

'God spelt backwards'

the ZEN of dogs.

Milton Moon.

By the same author:

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For godson Tim

Introduction

Sugar was dying: late at night I was sitting close alongside her basket just touching her with my hand. Every now and then she lifted herself, our eyes meeting briefly before she rested her head back on the woven cane edge. I had sat with dying dogs before and the immeasurable sadness was that you can't tell them what you feel. The only thing you can hope for is that, in some transcendent way, you are able to transmit some comforting thought: not only your feeling of deep love but also your humble gratefulness for the privilege of sharing their much too short life. That night I was sharing in her 'end.'

Sugar fought to the very last. She badly, very badly, didn't want to let go of her life—unless, of course, I went with her. She had several illnesses which had made her life a little miserable and for the last month she had come into my bedroom at night, for reassurance mainly, because she knew things weren't right.

She had a collapsed larynx, much worse in winter, but a syringe-full of a linctus gently squirted into her mouth several times a day helped. She read

my mind when it was time for her medicine, going to a particular spot and lying on the floor, always in the same way, knowing, waiting.

Surprisingly she never spilled a drop, even though her head lay sideways on the floor.

I joked, in a flat sort of way, telling her our house was like a needle-exchange centre, that she was a junkie.

Feeling quite bereft since she went. Quite tearful in fact, although tears won't come, can't come; best described perhaps as being empty within, and all about; empty in my soul in a strange sort of way.

Did Sugar know about a soul? Some experts say dogs can't know things, not the way *we* know them. 'Dogs aren't capable of abstract thought' they say. But no one knows everything: experts can be wrong, sometimes in ignorance, often in arrogance. Anyway, no one knows what a soul is. Dogs may not *think* about souls but whatever a soul '*is*' I am sure that a dog, even in small measure, is an expression of it.

What *is* nice about a dog is their total honesty: I feel sure that they don't possess guile, or duplicity; well certainly not like humans.

Sugar lived with us for only ten years and we value every one of them because those years were totally honest. Her love for us was honest, as was ours for her.

Zen and a dog.

‘Does a dog have Buddha nature?’

In many monasteries in Japan and China, as part of their strict training, questions are often given to Zen monks on which to meditate, at times for months on end, sometimes years. In Japan these questions are known as *koans*.

One of the first of these questions is about dogs and this particular one has been part of the Zen study curriculum, passed down through the generations since the 9th century. In Japan it is simply known as Joshu’s ‘Mu.’

Dating from that time there have been many learned commentaries on this one *koan* alone. A *koan* cannot be answered by application of the intellect. Any attempt to do so will, in Zen terms, fall so far short of an answer it serves only to add confusion upon confusion.

A monk asked a Zen Master a simple question; ‘do dogs have Buddha nature?’ The master replied ‘Mu’ an answer which has several meanings but for this purpose could be translated as ‘No’. This would have been a surprising response for the monk because every single thing is

supposed to have a Buddha nature. The Master's 'No', of course, meant much more than a simple statement in the negative, but it was not for the Master to explain but rather for the student himself to concentrate his thought and penetrate to the central essence of this 'No'.

Since that early exchange between student and master, Joshu's 'Mu' has been one of the most important of the Zen *koans*.

It is said you must carry both the question, and the Master's response, in your mind until it 'burns in flames' any thought you might have that *you* can possibly arrive at an answer either through application of intelligence or the intellect. It is said the answer must come—if it comes at all—not through contrivance, but 'of itself.' It sounds easy, but to penetrate to the essence of *koans* can be extremely challenging. Some of those who have followed this path confess that 'of all difficult things nothing is more difficult.' If the right answer does come you won't need anyone to tell you: you will *know*. More importantly, if, or when, the 'answer' does come, the experience will stay with you for the rest of your life, affecting both your thinking and your very being. It is this experience

that begins a journey to what is termed 'enlightenment.'

Enlightenment? No one religion owns enlightenment: it seems all religions—especially those with a contemplative core—experience a consciousness-widening flash of insight when the mind/brain finally escapes from the impasse brought on by the stress of doubt. There have been many learned books written on that subject but no one understands it so completely they can give a complete definition. This seemingly simple happening, more profound than a mere 'insightful' leap, has been the spiritual core of most genuine spiritual traditions, going back far further than written history itself. It should also be stated that this change of consciousness can happen to anyone, heedless of commitment, even none at all. But it can and does happen 'of itself' and there have been periods when this search was central to life itself.

Learning from a dog can be very Zen.

God spelt backwards

Godson Tim: a grown man now with his own family and established life, but many years ago, not yet fully grown-up he was paying a visit. Alone and without family support he was embarked on the journey we all make for the first time preparing to take one's place in the world. One sensed he was still seeking a confirmation of self as often happens when the young are rearranging a persona to accord with the identity with which they hope to feel comfortable. It is interesting noting this process, especially having known someone almost from their first breaths.

Tim was in his early twenties and at that time, his god-parents were in the early sixties—forty years separating the ages. What we did have in common was that both families were dog lovers.

Tim was visiting briefly on his way to a job far distant from his own family home. It was nice seeing him, recalling family events. Our own son was also far distant from his home, doing 'his own thing.'

On that afternoon it was pleasant walking together down a country lane accompanied by family dogs.

Somewhat wickedly the older man said to his young companion he was glad of this opportunity to speak privately. He explained that having been honoured as a godparent there were certain responsibilities, one of which was an obligation to say something about spiritual matters and perhaps provide some sort of guidance or direction concerning a 'religious life.'

Dead silence! The younger man was obviously uncomfortable although still polite. In truth he hardly knew what to say, or what not to say, or how to escape. He looked to the ground scuffing stones little knowing the godparent was acutely aware of the burning ears and embarrassment at what might come next.

"Have you ever stopped to consider the word God?" More awkward silence. The older man continued:

"God! No other word has the same letters, except one. That word is Dog! DOG is GOD spelt backwards!"

Laughter, awkward, but mixed with relief.

The older man hoped his god-son would eventually forgive him.



Godson Tim and Bodie

David the Vet

David the Vet had shared several sad departures: one was to an old Labrador.

We knew the end was coming: walks around the block became walks to the end of the street, then counted in houses until she no longer walked at all.

As she lay in front of the heater with the family gathered about, she went peacefully. David said it was the nicest goodbye he had seen.

David was more than our vet; he was a friend. He was also something of a Zennist in his direct no-nonsense way. I don't think he knew much about the subject of Zen or what the word really meant. But that too can be very Zen.

We mostly had two dogs and they were always girls. The older one had the job of bringing up the latest arrival to the family. The Lab brought up the Rottie who in turn brought up the Heeler-cross who in her turn passed on advice and house rules to the Rhodesian Ridgeback. After that there was one dog only.

We had never thought to own a Ridgeback but this very cute chestnut-coloured puppy with a perfect ridge down her back, arrived from another city, almost a thousand kilometres away. She was a loving gift from a dog-lover friend hearing that one of the family dogs had died.

It arrived on the wrong flight at the wrong time, the tiniest pup in the very largest size of rented airline cages. The airline had been told the breed was a Rhodesian Ridgeback. She could have been held in the palm of a hand but the airline thought the pup was a grown dog so she travelled first class.

At that time we had a much-loved South African friend who had cancer. Knowing the predicted number of months left to her our friend had taken to bed in her artistic home. Later no longer able to cope she left forever those once cherished things of transient but material beauty, giving herself into the care of those who knew what caring was, spending her last days in a Roman Catholic hospice. Although not from Rhodesia she would still be familiar with this breed of dog and so on the way home from the airport, obeying a sudden impulse,

new owner with baby pup detoured to call in at the hospice.

‘May I take her to see Eileen?’

‘Of course’ replied the tiny nun, ‘we *have* had a pony!’

‘My God,’ I thought, ‘there *is* a God here.’

Eileen was in her bed, hair softly grey, smartly styled, in a pretty nightdress, framed against white sheets. Her gentle joy and beautiful tender smile as she watched the puppy clambering up and tumbling over the small hillocks of her knees leaving faintly indented footprints on the bed-cover was radiant reward.

A life of caring, a caring moment returned.

Original sin?

Life is not always gently poignant. Nor is memory always pleasant and safely stored for soft recall.

A nightmarish image, a time from early childhood. Walking at dusk along a bayside beach and seeing a bulging sack washed up with the incoming tide, innocent curiosity made the child struggle to untie the rope. Peering into the dark-wet interior, the unbelievable horror of little saltwater sodden bodies, eyes tightly closed, together in a knotted bundle their lives ended almost before they had begun. Even now, some four-score years later it is still recalled as a moan deep within the mind, an agonised realisation of humankind's oft-inhumanity. Since then, again and again, similar uncaring wantonness repeated in so many different ways. Unwanted, but carried forever deep within consciousness, it remains a sickening horror-montage, sin upon sin upon sin. With age the pain doesn't diminish. Rather the cry within is more sharply heard, but there seems no point in asking 'Why?'

Skippy the Kelpie.

Skippy was an eager happy super-active red kelpie. The brother who owned him was much older and before I was able to properly value him, or his dog, he went to war, and then to live elsewhere and make his own family. I do remember quite clearly that he and his dog Skippy were for a time famous, or infamous, in the city where they lived. The brother worked at the family firm, a timber mill and joinery-making factory, trucking deliveries of timber and joinery all over the city. It was an old-fashioned truck, with a long tray-deck for carrying large quantities of either dressed-timber or newly felled trees from forest leases. There was a single-seat straight-back half-cabin with a forward curving roof, typical of vehicles of the 1920's and 30's..

Skippy the dog rode on top of the sloping cabin, an area of less than a square metre, his sure-footedness secured, if not guaranteed, by a slim piece of timber screwed to the front of the cabin-top. He danced in circles, barking at trams and buses and passing cars, never once stumbling. I recall family discussions about objections and accusations from

indignant animal protectionists. Angry motorists wrote to the newspapers; indignant reports were made to the various authorities about the danger posed, not only to the dog, but to surprised or shocked motorists taken unawares. Not everyone was appalled; some sent supportive letters to the press. It was all to no avail as Skippy's antics transgressed some traffic law and there was no point in contesting the final decision, but those who understood kelpies knew it was what they *had* to do.

Dandy



Dandy—about the 1930's

A brother in his adventurous early teens, roaming with friends, searching for treasures at a local quarry used as an illegal rubbish dump found a small dog. It was eking out an off-street existence scavenging for food remnants. Had he been dumped? It was quite obvious this small animal had been injured. If it had been hit by a passing car the motorist could hardly have been blamed as the dog might have wandered into its path. Certainly its vision was limited by long matted hair that served not only to blindfold but camouflage it as a bundle of rags. It was a most unusual animal, smallish but interesting in its uniqueness. Some things seem destined in life, and a teenager found a dog and a dog found

an owner, the adoption instant and mutual.

Luckily something about this odd-looking bundle appealed to my father because he was allowed stay.

This dog looked so different that many were the guesses as to its origin. He had the matted dreadlocks coat of a Hungarian Puli or the Komondor. But he was half the size of the former and at most a quarter the size of the latter. Someone suggested he looked a little like the rare Scottish Dandie Dinmont and our new little dog certainly had their reputed fearlessness. We might not have identified the breed but the name Dandie stuck, except we spelt it with a 'y'. Dandy became a new member of the family.

In those days most shopping was home delivered; milk and bread, fruit and veggies, and groceries, but not meat. Most deliveries, apart from the groceries, came via horse and cart. Little Dandy resented anyone outside the family coming into the high-walled and totally enclosed back part of our yard. So ferocious was his resentment that someone had to hold him from attacking the intruder, even familiar delivery persons. Woe to any person if

they fumbled the gate-latch and more than one had a nipped ankle. Despite the early misfortunes of Dandy's life he had great good fortune inheriting excellent survivor genes as well as a ferocious immune-system; he outlived a succession of dogs.

Not only dogs bite

My father had to make a quick call at his timber mill, leaving my mother and some of the family sitting in the car. Opposite the mill, across a busy road which carried both cars and trams, an altercation was being enacted as we watched. A smallish nondescript-looking fox terrier wandered off the street into the front of an unfenced but well kept house and garden. It was a habit in those days for many gardens to be replanted each year with annuals in lines as straight as tram tracks, with larger flowers at the back, grading to small plants close to the trimmed lawn edges.

The little intruder into this garden was doing no harm to anyone but suffered the misfortune of meeting the owner, who at that very moment was working on his regimented plantings. This irate man seeing the little dog on his domain immediately jumped to his feet. Grabbing the longish plank used for marking out the straight lines he began to thrash the small bewildered and cowering dog. I am told—though I remember nothing—one small boy driven by blind fury and uttering strange animal noises bounded from the car. Ignoring clanging trams and

hooting cars he raced across the road and up the drive into the fenceless garden. To his mother's horror this same wild-animal child snatched the plank from the householder and began to thrash him around the legs and body. My father had returned to the car in time to witness what was happening and immediately crossed the road to intervene, rescuing the householder whilst holding a ball of struggling fury by the scruff of the neck. I don't know how the whole impasse was resolved because the mists of anger blinded both reason and memory.

Duke



Me, Duke and Dandy—1938

Aged about ten there was a house I often passed. Lying on the drive, behind large wrought-iron gates, there was, at most times, an Irish Setter watching the world go by. If he wasn't there a sharp whistle brought him bounding to the gates. We became almost daily friends as he lived on a street I could choose as a detour on my way to and from school. The meetings were happy, with pats offered and received through the gates, but on occasions when the gates were ajar, pats became prolonged hugs and a bond was formed. One day the dog followed me home, which I didn't actually discourage. Immediately I was

despatched to return it to its rightful home.

We lived about a half mile from the dog's home but, on occasions, the dog just turned up. I didn't know then, while humans might choose the dog they own, some dogs, notwithstanding ownership, choose those on whom they bestow their liking, loyalty, and even love. It was so with this dog.

This is not always the fault of the owners, who might live full lives and are just too busy to give affection. Or perhaps they just don't understand affairs of a dog's heart regarding them as something purchased, to be there for the right occasion; like owning a car, a tennis racquet, or a boat for fishing.

I can't recall now the mechanics of the transfer, but, in spite of all the owners' attempts to stop the dog's new allegiance, the handsome Irish Setter came to live at our house, becoming a companion for me, and for little Dandy. The beautiful Irish Setter had the somewhat regal name of Duke, but I am not sure whether I was vassal or overlord. He was loved and cared for and was happy in the life he had chosen. We never knew his age but after some two years Duke died, whilst Dandy seemed to go on forever.

Dandy was never my companion in the same way Duke had been. Anyway, he was self-contained and didn't need demonstrated affection. If he belonged to anyone it was to my father he seemed to relate. The brother who originally rescued him was by then also serving God, King and country.

Nature or nurture?

The garden in which I grew up was much more creatively designed than most others I knew. There were the usual open spaces with formal gardens and paths. As such they served a useful purpose, but more excitingly for a child was that they offered contrast and counterpoint to more secret and secluded areas planted with forest tree-ferns and strange epiphytic dwellers gathered from the deepest and darkest parts of rain-forests. Also there were orchids, elkhorns and staghorns. There was a large free-form fish pond surrounded by bush paths and forest ferns, with more staghorns and elkhorns secretly enclosed in slatted and timber-lathed dark rooms. There was also a heated room with stained-glass windows for small exotic ferns and rare orchids. It was a nice place for dogs, cats, birds *and* humans and I am grateful still for this part of my early life. It didn't perhaps socialise one small boy but it was a place of nurture for dreams, imagination and fantasy. And for the dogs it provided a host of changing smells, which, for a dog, make up a language: the bigger the vocabulary the less the boredom.

Gipp

It is claimed by many owners that the Australian border-collie sheepdog, like all his ancestors, is regarded as one of the cleverest in the world. I can attest to the cleverness of Gipp. I don't know whether he was a so-called pure breed or whether he had a helping of the equally clever kelpie strain added to the already formidable border-collie DNA, but with hindsight and greater knowledge I am sure he was all border-collie.

Gipp and his owner shared one unchallenged, and mutual, characteristic—total excited enjoyment of the physicality of life.

There was one special daily game we shared, much to the horror of the neighbourhood. It involved roller-skates.

Gipp quickly learned his part in our marvellous game. A game? Some neighbours said it was better described as high-velocity mayhem. We lived on the corner of two streets which were two sides of an oblong block of suburban houses. The 'game' consisted of my being towed at breakneck speed up the hill from the corner of our home—the shorter leg of the oblong—to a longer street at the

top, which being flat was traversed at Olympic gold medal speed. Then, on turning the corner, we would hurtle downhill at more than the established traffic speed limit to the next corner, the home run to our house. Not only was it the home run, the street itself was perfectly level and straight. 'Our' footpath—as I always called it—was asphalt, but the one on the other side was beautifully paved with large squares of glass-smooth concrete, the regular small gap between the squares being, what I now know to be, expansion joints. On this perfect surface, the sound of my skates, the barking of the dog, and the increasing rate of the clickety-clickety-clackety-clack over the joint gaps indicating our velocity all amounted to sheer exhilaration, a mixture of excited endorphins and utter joy.

It was a rather sedate suburb and I don't know how many of the householders allowed memory of their own childhood to temper their reactions, but one person, irritated beyond measure, waited for us and threw a piece of timber across our path as we approached. Gipp easily jumped the dangerous obstacle, followed by his owner, both by this time almost airborne. The over-the-shoulder

derision was certainly not the language



Gipp—1938

of Sunday-school attendance. Something was said because I had to choose another circuit. For a time Gipp and I chose the local Methodist church precinct where the paths were equally

smooth. The shorter lengths of the paths of this new rink required more balletic skill than Formula One speed especially when negotiating tight turns. Some of the richer kids had newer skates with fibre wheels but mine were the older metal ones. Noticing some of the church elders inspecting the slight marking of the surface made by my metal wheels I knew it wouldn't be long before this site too would be out -of-bounds.

At school fetes I earned money for whatever was the specified good cause by holding a stick in front of Gipp who obligingly jumped it. The more money paid the higher the stick was held and Gipp never failed me. We might not have earned either respect or favourable notoriety in other ways but Gipp's jumping performances earned some sort of minor accolade. Gipp's life was short. In those days pet care was not readily available. It was wartime. I can't remember a vet being around the corner, and not everyone had spare money to afford for proper care for their pets. Rich or poor, the scourge of the dog world, in the form of distemper, visited many dog-owning homes and Gipp was one who died. I don't recall the details and expect they are buried deep within my psyche. I remember his sickness but not a thing of his going.

A time without Dogs

Growing older one discovers activities that not only increase endorphins but excite mysterious hormone flows. Although a devoted dog lover and could speak fluent 'dog' I was beginning to learn other languages. I might have stumbled on the grammar a little but understood the sense of the prose.

Some of the local girls of richer families had horses and although I was a little bewildered when confronting the mystery of the former I was able to quickly establish a familiar wavelength with the latter. The mysterious excitement of that period passed all too quickly.

The war, combined with an uncertain future, changed many plans. It certainly changed mine. One was expected to either 'join-up' or be 'called-up' unless there was a very good reason. With three brothers in the Air Force I expected I would join them. At seventeen I changed directions enlisting in the Navy simply because one could join-up a year earlier.

The introduction to Navy life was at the Flinder's Naval Depot, HMAS Cerebus.

The name of the naval base was itself the name of a dog, of sorts. *Cerberus* was the multi-headed hound of Greek and Roman legend who guarded the gates to Hades preventing those who, having crossed the River Styx, from ever returning to their previous life. There was little hope of forming a bond with such a dog. For three years no other dog entered my world.

A new world beckoning

The war over a Wire-haired Fox-terrier called Butch came into my life briefly, part of the family of the girl I would eventually marry.

I had never met one of these dogs before. The ordinary run-of-the-mill clean-skin 'foxies' I knew but 'wire-hairs' were new to me. I wondered whether they were as good at 'ratting' as the ordinary everyday 'foxie.' I recall being in awe of the 'ratting' skill of the foxies. Some years later, I witnessed a City Council rat-pack of foxies trained for this purpose and seeing them in action was almost worthy of being accorded a horror film 'R' rating. I witnessed a forty-strong pack of these dogs kill an estimated two thousand rats, or more, in a couple of hours. We lived opposite a badly-maintained poultry farm which specialised in breeding and sexing one-day old chicks. When the farm and the pens and coops were demolished for real estate development it was discovered there were more rats in residence than chooks. No wonder they went out of business feeding that many rats. The slaughter was a scene from hell.

Butch the wire-hair lived an idyllic life eating and barking, then eating more and barking some more.

An immediate summing-up indicated sharp intelligence and a speed of movement to match the speed of mind, but then he was a terrier.

Wire-haired 'foxies' are described as a 'medium-sized dog with a relatively flat skull. They have small upturned ears the tops of which drop more to the side rather than to the front. Some add they have a sharp bite to match the bark.

For some inexplicable reason the fashion those days was to dock their tails by about a quarter. An un-docked tail looks splendid, sticking upright like a flag-pole but fashion and Canine Councils decided they looked better without the pointy-end bit. Silly and painful.

The dog is strong, muscular, and the legs are straight. It weighs around seven to nine kilos and all-in- all it is a tough little animal. As the name suggests it was bred for fox hunting in England somewhere around the mid 19th century but possessing the terrier instinct for hunting and killing anything would be fair game. It has very thick hair, whitish with brown or black markings. Bold-as-brass they might be but they are also affectionate. I didn't

know him long enough to make other judgements.



Butch—1947

Dogs have the same idiosyncrasies as humans do. Nature, or nurture, they can be friendly, suspicious, timid, happy-go lucky and out-going, or quick of temper, even plain nasty. But superficially, as one would expect of a dog owned by caring owners, Butch seemed a happy dog. Butch wasn't destined to be a permanent part of our lives and soon after I got to know him, quite suddenly and unexpectedly he had imposed upon him another life. In this case a tragic misfortune forced quite unforeseen changes. Sadly it is often the case, when changes occur within a family, the family dog too finds its world

turned tumbly-turvy. A dog in this situation has to cope with a new life and new allegiances and it is impossible to explain to them why this is so. Some dogs seem to cope with change more than others do, but in all cases any change causes confusion. In the case of Butch the new life wasn't too difficult to accommodate because kind neighbours, and more importantly family friends who knew him well were able to give him both home and love. Butch, quite simply, shifted next door where there were familiar noises and almost the same smells.

In a new city, living in a 'once-nice-old-house' there were mice galore and one young male was despatched to buy a cat from the pet store at a market place. He came home with a puppy and in explanation lamely said all the 'grubby-handed snotty-nosed little kids, and passers-by in general,' were molesting the puppy, picking it up and dropping it, and he had to rescue it. Maybe when he grew older he would frighten the mice. The old crone of a landlady was seen holding it and soon it succumbed to rat poison. I don't think she approved of its presence and we left as soon as possible.

Cain.



Cain in the bath on cracker night

Another city, a new life, a new dog. He was called Cain. A dashing splendidly-handsome dog his new owners were very proud of him. The pedigree listed, not once but three entries (or was it four?) recording descent from a champion Irish setter imported from overseas. Despite knowing very little about either 'line' breeding or 'in' breeding that number of listings of the same dog in one pedigree should have caused concern. In fact, at that time, anyone who owned a female Irish Setter in that city (and further afield besides) sought to have it mated with this illustrious import. But we seemed lucky with Cain; any faults likely to

appear in this ad hoc breeding pattern were not obvious in our dog. I foolishly joined a kennel club and began to show him. An enthusiast by nature for a time I threw myself, and our dog, into every available show-ring.

With hindsight, the most I can say about showing dogs is, unless you wish to breed them and need the exposure, the enterprise is not always pleasant.

Some breeders of the other local Irish setters were a little dismissive, if not rudely derisive of my dog. I am a little ashamed to admit I could actually understand their attitude. Most show-animals of this breed, with low-set long ears and copious chest and tail feathering—which suggested they needed the daily attention of an experienced hairdresser—were as glamorous as catwalk fashion models. Of course, local judges reinforced their assessments by dismissing our Cain as a bit of a ‘roughie.’ We had the last laugh though when a specialist judge visiting from Interstate gave Cain first prize. Forced to defend his selection to the angrily-offended and affronted breeders he was roughly to the point: ‘this dog’ he said ‘is the only one here capable of a bloody hard day’s work. As for the rest of them? In the field

working they would be (expletive) useless.'

He was right of course, setters are, first and foremost, working dogs.

The common name for the Irish Setter is 'Red' Setter. No one really knows much about its origin but, according to one authority at least, the breed was established in the same year my father was born, 1882, which makes it easy to remember. Other opinions say the origins can be traced back as far as the 1700's, so who knows?

The Irish setter is a nice dog, friendly and generally obedient, albeit a little 'laid-back' on occasions. Some owners say they have a habit of 'hearing only what they want to hear.' Would that be the Irish in them?

In the field they have the attractive habit of 'setting' quarry, standing stock-still, lifting one paw, 'pointing' in the exact direction of whatever has taken their interest. When well-fed and in good health their coats are an amazing dazzle in the sun-light, a mix of darkish red with lighter chestnut tints.

In build they are not a thick dog but rather athletic and racy. Their chest, although deep tends to be narrow rather than broad. The neck is strong and the handsome head held high.

A second Irish Setter came into our lives when we purchased Amber. She had a pedigree identical to Cain's but from a later litter.

It was said by someone with mistaken authority that growing up together they would be unlikely to mate, but of course they did, a lesson to always read the 'fine print.' At work, I received a phone-call from a very cross wife who thought two dogs were quite enough without the added burden of a litter, but, the deed had been done. I swatted-up on everything I should 'know and do.'

We lived, at the time, in what is known as a 'Queenslander,' a house set up high on large stumps, said to be a pre-airconditioning solution for living in the sub-tropics. At the lowest part, down to the ground, was about two and a half metres and as the ground sloped, the highest part was about three metres. Sometimes the ground was left plain dirt, with others it was concreted fully, or in part. A proper whelping-area was prepared, set on a slightly-raised platform built for the purpose.

Awakened in the middle of the night to a squeaky puppy-yowl, in the dim light I could make out Amber sitting in the

dirt outside her carefully-made whelping area looking astonished at the appearance of a crying puppy lying in the dirt. Her look clearly said ‘where



The handsome Cain

‘did that come from?’ I persuaded Amber to enter her special ‘place’ and stayed with her until dawn assisting with the birth of her puppies. Amber was suffering from combined shock and fright and without help I wondered how many of the puppies would have survived. They all did! Seven of them.

Despite the burden of added responsibilities puppies are a joy. When it came time to sell them it wasn’t a case of who could afford

them, but who was good enough to be allowed have them. The ladies of the household vetted the would-be purchasers and their judgements were strict. On one occasion I was despatched to drive for an hour to the extremities of the other side of the city to try and tactfully refund money and reclaim a puppy. They were right; the new owner could hardly wait before thrusting the puppy into my arms with one hand whilst grabbing her money back with the other.

We had Amber de-sexed.

Russ the veterinarian was a friend, later to become eminent in his own special field of research. The de-sexing was done at his home, the operating theatre the kitchen table.

A memory that lasts to this day was when he said 'you'll notice when I touch her uterus she will moan.' And she did. I wondered then, with some awe, at the deep primaeval instincts which reside in the psyche. However nice-sounding, fanciful assumptions can be wrong. Recalling this, forty-five years or more later, with our own long-time vet, he said 'nothing mysterious, merely a pain response,' adding, that many years ago anaesthesia was not as sophisticated, nor as effective as modern anaesthetics and when he

touched the uterus he stretched the ovarian ligament and it was painful, hence the moaning. 'I queried why hadn't he given the animal more anaesthetic?' His reply was drily to the point; 'what did you want, a live dog or a dead dog?'

We shifted house to one on the edge of a forest-covered mountain area. For the first time we owned our own house: that in itself was exciting but to live near a mountain, on the edge of suburbia made it doubly so.

It was not a big mountain, in the scale of things, but it was both physically interesting as well as being ancient geologically. It became 'our' forest, a place almost exclusively owned by Cain, Amber and a short time later, an 'acquired' addition to our dog tribe. We roamed and explored for years on end. It was a haunting place and I delighted in the dogs' adventures free of direction or restraint.

The puppy which elected to be a member of the tribe was a Golden Cocker Spaniel of obvious spunk and intelligence. Early in his time, living at the end of our street, he discovered his fields of interest were wider than life on the end of a piece of rope. He would see us, myself, Cain and Amber,

heading off on our adventures up the mountain. This enterprising youngster decided that since he was the same colour as an Irish Setter he must surely be 'one of them.' Scarcely beyond the teething stage he nevertheless chewed through his restraining rope and began to visit.

I took him home, daily, for many weeks, but almost as quickly he chewed the rope through and followed my footsteps ten paces behind.

The little pup was clearly not getting either the attention he wanted, nor the proper food. It was only a matter of ignorance, and besides, the puppy's owners had a newly-born baby of their own.

A pup needs its own food formula and, like human babies, needs to be fed several times a day. A puppy also needs the proper amount of calcium to aid bone growth; inevitably we gave him both. The owners didn't really want him; their purchase had been a mistake and they were relieved to sell him to us. He became a member of 'our' tribe and we called him Red Dust. He was very brave and in light of what lay ahead needed to be. He could also brawl if he thought there was a need to do so, at times taking on a dog twice his size. He was well-bred. His ears

were long, skull finely dome-shaped and his body formation was excellent.

The spaniel breed goes back hundreds of years and one theory is that the name 'Spaniel' suggests a Spanish origin where dogs of this type flushed-out prey in wet marshy areas. There are records going back many hundreds of years confirming the spaniel usefulness both as hunter and companion. The breed probably changed little in the early years, but once dogs are introduced to the show-ring changes inevitably happen, and do so quickly as fashions change and owner-conceit takes over. A harsh judgement? Probably not: I have seen photographs of show-ring specimens that ridicule the notion that these were once 'working-dogs.'

As for our Red Dust? A beautiful feisty nature was to his credit but he was also a perfect example of the absurdity of fashion dictates. Some climates might have suited him but certainly the humidity



Red Dust

where we lived was not the ideal place



Amber and Red Dust eating charcoal

for any dog with heavily drooping floppy ears. The ear canal is deep and when it is heavily blanketed and un-aired with low-set flaps it become an ideal site for bacterial growth. Little Red Dust, very early in life developed Canker, which developed into a distressing ear condition. If his ears had been set higher and were smaller, canker might not have occurred simply because the ear canal would have been better aired. If one observes dogs you'll notice how mobile and expressive their ear movements are, developed this way over hundreds of years—not so with our dog.

We became regular visitors to the Queensland University Veterinary School, which, at that time, wasn't all that far away from where we lived. The



Red Dust

Uni Vets ,as we called it, was our clinic when problems arose, as they inevitably did with three dogs. With Red Dust they tried everything they could think of to stop the worsening ear canker. Eventually they performed experimental operations to physically drain the ear. Instead of the canal being horizontal, the operations each side made a channel, or gutter, sloping downwards from deep inside the ear itself. Red Dust looked a little unusual with long ears strapped over his head whilst each operation healed, staged as they were, a month or so between them. From memory I don't recall them charging us for this service as it was 'experimental.'

Red Dust was a tough little dog and coped well with the physical indignities to which he was periodically subjected. All three dogs loved the mountain area.

I recall one particular over-hanging rock where I would sit whilst the dogs roamed free. I was always astonished how they eventually found me, wherever I happened to be, when it was time to go home. I was also surprised that out of the three dogs it was Red Dust who returned soaked to the skin: he had an ability to find water if there was any to be found.

Red Dust lived a relatively long life, mostly happily. One will never know the cause but he became blind. I am told that some dogs are able to cope with blindness but in this instance little Red Dust's courage let him down. He would find safety only in the corner of a room where he was supported on two sides. He became obviously frightened and distressed if moved away from the supporting walls. There was nothing else to do but end his misery. The Vet School had shifted to newer premises a long way away and so it was to a different vet I had to take him. He gave Red Dust the needle to bring comforting sleep. He told me that what he gave him 'would give anyone a 'trip' of all trips.' He died in my arms.

We owned another cocker, liver-coloured, but only over-night. She died the day after purchase, vomiting

worms: the vet found her heart was infested with worms. This dog came from someone who regarded himself an experienced breeder but clearly didn't know all that he should have known. We have a family saying that people should pass an exam before they are allowed to cast a vote on who governs the country and the same goes for the breeding of livestock, especially dogs.

(I must confess that in those early days there was a great deal I didn't know myself, but at least I knew to ask advice. I sometimes shudder at my ignorance. Still!)

We were on holidays when Cain died. We were as careful as one can be about kennelling but in those days not all kennel owners were as professional as they ought to have been. Now it is demanded that owners produce veterinary certificates showing dates of inoculations ensuring animals boarded will not introduce illness into the kennels or become ill themselves. A phone-call told us Cain had died. It was sad not to have been with him. As far as we can work out Cain was born about 1949. Our son, Damon, born ten years later, has a baby memory of looking up from where he was lying out

in the sun, seeing this large dog head staring down at him. As close as we can work out Cain was somewhere around twelve years of age. The kennel owner was defensive and there was nothing that could be done about it, except grieve for our loss.

Amber lasted some more years but, one night I noted she had jammed herself in a doorway. I was shocked to see how swollen her body had become. I rang Russ the same vet who had speyed her, describing her state. He said it indicated a 'loss of tone' and she was dying. He came quickly and gave her a merciful needle.

I was not as sober as I should have been and unwisely decided she should be buried on the mountain she loved so much. It was a moon-lit night and with Amber over my shoulders, and a spade in my hand, I carried her up the mountain. Luckily I knew it like the back of my hand, and, not even thinking of snakes, or much else for that matter, carried her to the top-most ridge. I had forgotten that this was an ancient mountain, and the spade was useless because there was almost no soil to dig. The top and slopes were a mixture of gravels and rocks, from small pebbles of all geologic types, to

large outcrops of black granite or basalt: only eucalypts, grasses and grass-trees survived up there.

Unable to make a hole, by the light of the moon I decided I would honour Amber by constructing a large cairn of rocks. I don't know how long it took me, but eventually she was interred in what I thought to be a construction worthy of her devotion and loyalty.

Next morning, feeling somewhat the worse for wear, I went up the mountain to inspect my handiwork. I was slightly alarmed at how close I had been to quite dangerous rock ledges.

Eventually I located the cairn but any feeling of comfort I might have felt in my handiwork was dismissed with the sight of one paw protruding from under a rock. I hastily completed the repairs to the cairn, and now, close to a half century later, wonder whether she still remains undisturbed, perhaps with an occasional visitor wondering at the presence of what they imagine to be an early surveyors marker.

We were dog-less for about a year, as other parts of the world beckoned.

When we returned from parts distant we left our mountain shifting our abode to a new home and some acres of land on the other side of town, situated on a

right-angle bend of the Brisbane River.
It was above flood-level and an ideal
place to live and even more so for a
dog.

Peri

It was a gift from friends—a Labrador puppy. Labs like water, and with a deep river at the bottom of the slope of our land, this lovely lady had as much water as her heart desired. She grew up with water and was equally at home in it, as she was on dry land. We called her Peri, short for Periwinkle.

Labradors are said to be the most popular dog in the world and it is easy to understand why this is so. The breed goes back hundreds of years and there are many accounts of the way they developed. They come in either cream or black, and less commonly, chocolate. I was familiar with the whitish cream or just plain cream ones, colours mostly associated with the ‘guide dogs’ or ‘seeing-eye’ dogs. Gradually there seemed to be more black-coloured ones appearing and it was argued by their owners that they were more intelligent than ‘the rest.’ I don’t know that there *is* any basis for that, but owners being what they are, such claims will always be made for whichever the colour of one’s dog. Labs are enormously stable, but even then, only the most carefully selected

ones are chosen and trained for the vision-impaired, and blind. In a suburb close to where I live I often see Labs 'in training' being walked in busy areas. Even to my untrained eye it is obvious which ones are likely to be promoted to 'real-life' duty, whereas the others, more interested in the 'passing parade,' will become pets for some incredibly lucky owners.

The Brisbane river which we overlooked flowed all the way to Moreton Bay, thirty to forty kilometres away. The river served as the main transport highway for coal from a coal-mine some miles upstream to the Power House a good distance downstream. The barges were painted as colourfully as Mississippi River steamers, a happy contrast to the usual drabness of working craft. Our house was a focus point for the barges coming downstream, indicating the right-angle turn of the river. We happily exchanged greetings with the crews of the barges waving by day. At night they would flash their light up to the house. The dog looked out for their arrival, rewarded at times with uneaten, or half-eaten sandwiches thrown over the side.



Beautiful Peri with owners. Photo by Milton Wordley

Peri
was

born with a free spirit. She roamed constantly and her playmate and kindred spirit was Jeeves, a tawny-coloured boxer who lived some houses away at the end of our road. Jeeves would come calling and like two errant kids they would disappear, always returning some hours later. One day there was a phone call from a place miles distant across the river. It was a prison farm and the caller said they had arrested Peri and Jeeves enjoying a game with the cattle. The dogs had taken a direct route, as the

crow flies almost, to reach their destination. No such luck for the owners. The local ferry was out of action, so with a city to traverse and a river to cross it took some hours to bail out the dogs. Released from custody we tried a little harder to curtail adventures. This wasn't easy, especially with Peri, a free-soul and no understanding of discipline. This was the pattern of her life from that period on. Always, the distant fields beckoned. Intelligent though she was she could never have been harnessed to duties as a seeing-eye dog.

We acquired a small river craft. For the time we lived at that home we enjoyed the experience of exploring the river and the local creeks which fed into it. Peri, of course, accompanied us but however much we tried to cajole or persuade, she wouldn't be lowered with the boat onto the water. She insisted on swimming out to clamber in over the side. It can be attested that the heavy coat of a Labrador holds some gallons of water such was the large amount left swishing around our feet after Peri had come aboard. When she did not accompany us the amount of water in the bottom was an absolute nil.

The home might have been ours but the river was undeniably hers. And so it was for a few short years. We had a swimming pool close to the house but Peri showed no interest in swimming there; she had a river. Anyway, the pool was always filled with our son Damon's friends, with horses tethered to the breeze-block wall. Our home in the North was to be exchanged for one in the South.

The Athens of the South

Peri and her family left a sub-tropical environment to live and work in Adelaide over one and a half thousand kilometres to the south-west in South Australia. The climate is said to be mediterranean but in reality Adelaide is the driest city in the driest state in what is said to be the driest land mass in the world. This change was to a new job, a totally new life, and it was where we were to stay.

This change of life seemed not to make a skerrick of difference to the four-legged members of the family, either the cat or the dog. If members of the humans of the family had reservations, the animals seemed to have none.

One of the very good things about Labradors they seem less-fazed about life-changes than is the case with some other dogs. Labs also seem to accommodate changes in ownership quite equably whereas many other dogs find this almost unacceptably life-changing, and at times impossible.

We interrupted our lives, living in the Athens of the south—as it was called — to spend a year in Japan. During that time the friends who rented our

house also looked after our animals, apparently without trauma or drama; but of course it was their home, their territory.



Peri growing old gracefully

In Japan we had little to do with dogs. Whilst travelling around the country we saw many examples of the splendid-looking 'bear' of a dog, the Akita. This handsome animal is said to be descended from the Japanese native dog, the 'matagi,' used for hunting by the early inhabitants. I confess that I thought the variation in types I saw during travels was due to cross-breeding within the Akita line. Experts on the original native-Japanese dog insist on quite separate classifications as there are several strands of the so-called 'matagi' line

identified by the names of the locality with which they are associated.

The differences that do exist are explained by the isolation of places, especially in the early days, due to the topography of the country.

Developments, in many ways, both animal and human, and cultural were constrained by this isolation.

All 'matagi' dogs, whatever the size, are described as 'Spitz-looking' with rather short pricked ears, triangular eyes set in a very characteristic 'wedge' head. Also characteristic is the tail tightly curved over the back. These days, the dog we know as an Akita is said to be much larger than the original 'matagi' dogs. We learned how the breed almost died out during the war, the claim being that many were slaughtered for their thick coats. Despite the reduced numbers at war's end, through the love and the obsessiveness of certain devoted Akita-lovers the breed was saved from early extinction.

Legend has it that at one time the Akita could only be owned by the Shogun, (and in all probability his favoured top military leaders) but like many such stories this could be 'wishful-thinking.'

What is factual is that the Akita dog was used for hunting, herding, and as a guard. There are tales of its bravery when used for hunting bears. Certainly it is a most impressive animal and it would have been a disaster for the canine world if these dogs, in their different types, had not been saved from dying out.

Like a certain Zen master I knew, and with whom I studied, the Akita is not to be taken lightly. Certainly, the larger types should only be owned by someone who understands their temperament and insists early that there are rules that must not be transgressed.

In the Adelaide Hills we lived in an old three-storey stone barn restored as a home, workshop and gallery for a new life and a new venture.

One of the earliest concerns, if not the biggest difficulty, was making the place escape-proof as the sight of distant mountains and open fields was a lure for Peri. We spent much time mending yet another gap which she could widen. Of course she did escape and we were contacted more than a few times to fetch her from some home where she had stopped-off for a drink and a short rest. It was not that she

couldn't find her way home because she had a very efficient mapping memory and always returned. But knowing her history we couldn't be sure that she might not stretch hospitality a little too much. Nor were we sure she wouldn't travel even further afield.

Peri needed something to curtail her adventurous ways; a responsibility perhaps, and this came in the form of another dog. This new addition wasn't yet a proper dog, still a puppy, and one which Peri was expected to bring up and educate, but in a more disciplined manner than her own upbringing. It worked. This not only proved to be a good therapy but started something we followed over many years with several dogs.

Snudge

Damon had inherited the ‘dog-gene.’ After all he had scarcely known a time when we didn’t have a dog, or dogs, as part of the household. The time came when he wanted one ‘for his very own.’ He chose a Rottweiler, a breed which wasn’t all that common at that time. We knew the correct pronunciation was Rott-viler but many others ‘better-informed’ corrected us, saying Rott-wheeler. There was a limit to the game of correction and rebuttal so the dog became a simple ‘Rottie.’ It may have been Damon’s dog but it was left to me to train, and Peri to teach house-rules. ‘Rotties’ need lessons in both; they are too strong-minded, as well as being too strong of body to be allowed have their own way.

‘Rotties’ have a long history, stretching back—so it is claimed—to the Roman Empire and since then have been put to many uses as a herding dog and stock guard and guardian generally. I recall reading that some merchants would hang their money pouches around a Rottie’s neck: brave person indeed who would risk a handbag-grab.

The name 'Rottweiler' comes from its association with the market town of Rottweil, where at one time, they were simply called 'butcher's dogs' because they were harnessed to small drays of meat. It is said, that being guard dogs, not only were their tails docked but also their ears thus preventing anyone from being able to physically grab and control the dog. As if!

The breed declined in popularity and like the Japanese Akita nearly died out, but with selected breeding the numbers are now quite large. As was to be the case with Damon's dog, breeding can sometimes go awry, especially so if the 'breeding pool' was small in number.

Damon's dog was called 'Snudge.' I used to invent stories when he was young. Central to the stories there was always a Wombat called Snudge and it was this name he chose for his dog. We both thought it quite appropriate because, with some imagination, one can see some sort of similarity between 'Rotties' and Wombats. So the name stuck, and as we agreed, she probably was the only 'Rottie' in the world with that name. Her table-manners were something of an issue. I recall giving her a bone,

and she snatched it. I took it back—or tried to—and she growled, a little too



Peri and Snudge

seriously for my liking. I growled back and and took the bone, explaining to her that if offered a bone she was never to snatch it, or growl. It took ten minutes only, both giving a bone and taking it back, and praising her for being so good from then on one could take bones from her mouth. It was a small point but a necessary one, especially so when out walking there was the occasional ‘odd’ find of a juicy bone, or a chook carcass.

Damon’s ‘Rottie,’ became a valued and much-loved member of the household and a lot of that was ‘down to Peri’s patience and and forbearance in her tutorship. Peri lived close to sixteen years of age and we still recall her with love and joy.

Blossom

One of our neighbours lived over the back fence and we conversed almost daily. She was a very feisty lady and we liked her a lot. Her family had all grown-up and left the nest but 'came or went' as they followed their life needs. One of her sons, who lived interstate stayed for a while, and brought his dog, a Blue Heeler called Kiff.

Kiff was my first experience of this sort of breed and although I was rather impressed with her obvious intelligence, our meetings at first, were rather testing. Kiff raised her eyebrows somewhat, taking exception to my habit of hopping over the back fence separating our properties. When she saw I was welcomed she objected less.

Kiff's owner, after a time explored fields elsewhere, but left his dog. It was interesting to see the way Kiff transferred tribal loyalties from the son to the mother following her one step behind, as she had done with the son. I began to take an interest in the breed and as I learned more about them realised this dog Kiff was a very good example of this type of working dog.

Kiff had never been de-sexed. She came into 'season' and the inevitable happened: from the appearance of the pups it was odds-on that a local Bull Terrier had claimed her favours. That particular dog was big, strong and tough with jaws like a mechanical vice and I thought the other country boys never stood a chance.

When the pups were born they were enclosed in a corral about the size of a baby's pen to keep them in the one area. Drawn by the baby-puppy squeals I jumped the fence to admire these new neighbours. This proved to be a trifle unwise as Kiff, in no uncertain terms, told this interloper to 'get lost' and 'stay my side of the fence.' I didn't, but every time I took the usual short-cut to speak with our neighbour, I made sure it was with a rolled-up newspaper to protect myself and ward off Kiff's attack. They weren't real attacks, rather her protesting a point, but all the same, she would have bitten me; a heeler isn't called a heeler for no reason at all.

One by one the pups went to new owners but there was one given away several times but always returned. With only one dog in our household I asked whether we could have that last remaining pup. The answer was a firm

'No' but I persisted and my badgering led to my getting it as a birthday present. Our neighbour was glad to see it go to live 'next door.'

Interestingly, it was now Kiff's turn to 'jump the fence' checking-up on her last puppy. She was welcome, of course, to come and go as she pleased and it was a little sad really when finally it was the puppy who told its mum to 'get lost.'

We called the pup Blossom and it was then Snudge's turn to bring up a new member of the family and teach it house rules.

Snudge and Blossom were good companions, for each other, and for me. Living in the country meant interesting walks morning and afternoon. It gave me an opportunity to really observe the differences in these two dogs.

Snudge the 'Rottie' had an astonishingly well-developed sense of smell. I used to throw stones for her quite a distance away, often into quite long grass. She was often hidden from sight and the only clue to her whereabouts was the movement of the grass. But she always found the stone, even though I had touched it for the briefest moment. If the grass was very

long her ‘fetching’ was made a little easier by my spitting on the stone before throwing it. No matter how far away Snudge always found it, emerging from the grassy forest a triumphant look on her face with the stone and strands of grass in her mouth.

Occasionally it wasn’t easy for her to find the stone and she would jump into the air to get the scent, but however long it took, she always found it.

I had to be careful in that she would anticipate where the stone might land and she would run and try to catch it before it landed. One day I threw a stone and too late realised she could intercept it—which she did. Added horror came when I saw a piece of tooth lying on the dirt track. I was aghast at my stupidity. What to do? We had a friend at that time, a dental specialist, who also had a ‘Rottie.’ An urgent phone call saw our dog being examined by a specialist no less. His opinion was, as the nerve



wasn't exposed it would be of little consequence.

Blossom's heeler genes came to the fore very early during those walks. Even as a puppy the movement of my shoes intrigued her. Her puppy game was to fasten on to the shoe-laces or to any part which she could grab, mostly my ankles. Growing from baby to young puppy she celebrated her happy existence by nipping my legs higher with every increase in her own height. Both my legs showed little scars getting higher each day. When she reached the knees I clipped her ears saying 'enough is bloody enough.' But the instinct remained. One youngish lady of the age between childhood dreams and fulfilled desires was visiting: she was wearing shoes that had ties up the leg reminiscent of the sort of sandals worn by Roman legionaries. Striding up and down, as was her habit, I mused about what self-images she might have been entertaining. To my amusement she was being followed by a heeler puppy making nipping motions at the leather ties. The young lady was totally unaware of the adventures being played-out far below her own interests, but glad that young shapely legs weren't also adorned with puppy teething marks: that would have needed an explanation.

Blossom had a rather cute trick of chasing her tail. I don't really know how it began but she quickly perfected her act. It was not an obsessive characteristic but rather a 'trick on demand,' a sort of theatrical performance.

Our vet, David, who had seen our dogs 'come and go' met Blossom early in her life when she was taken to the clinic for her puppy 'shots.' There was a shiny linoleum floor perfect for the occasion: I caught Bloss's eye and made the smallest circular motion with my fore-finger. She immediately looked over her shoulder at her tail-tip and went into a full-speed chase like a whirling dervish, skidding marvellously backwards in tight circles. Motioning to Blossom in a counter direction she skidded to a halt, then changing directions without missing a beat showed she could catch her tail (almost) going either way. The sound of skidding claws on a lino floor and her excited vocal accompaniment left David rolling with laughter. I don't know what everyone in the waiting room thought was going on. When David stopped laughing he said 'I'm not going to charge you for this visit, I haven't laughed so much in years.' He also confessed that at one time he had



Snudge and Blossom

owned a dog called 'Blossom' and our 'Bloss' might have brought back happy memories. Blossom had another trick. I had a petrol-driven mulcher and used it periodically to clean up the ever-constant mound of cuttings and prunings. Fed into the top of the machine the bits were ejected in a stream from a chute at the bottom. Bloss's game was to sit about twenty paces from the mulcher and catch the larger lumps as they whizzed out. It appeared a rather dangerous game but seemed to cause no harm. Her eye-mouth circuitry was very efficient and she soon had all the larger lumps piled up to one side of her. Interestingly, she never grabbed them from the air front on, but side on, in

passing, which took a lot of judgement and speed. I tried to stop her doing it but she enjoyed both the challenge and the game. I supposed compared



Bloss inside the house.

with the damaging sporting injuries footballers and rugby players suffer, Bloss's own contact-sport was less risky.

Other aspects of our dogs' behaviour intrigued me. During the day they spent as much time as they wished, either in the house, the garden, or keeping me company in my large workshop where they lazed around, mostly bedded in the luxury of large baskets. I would work away all day and they seemed not to take much notice at what was going on. My classical-music programs were to their taste, so it seemed, their peace

interrupted only when strangers or other dogs would pass.

A constant thought was how dogs seemed able to 'read' an owner's mind not only to actions, but also to moods. As we know almost nothing about the extreme ends of consciousness in humans so it shouldn't cause surprise the little we know about the canine equivalent. I mused that perhaps we have some sort of aura that the dogs read? Does 'thought' itself have a physical reality which we can't as yet measure? Perhaps it is not as silly as some would believe. For instance, how often does it happen that we look at someone else—even someone we don't know and are never likely to know—and that person immediately looks to the source. I have noticed if you *try* to do this it seems less likely to happen as when it occurs at a level of consciousness above any intention. Whatever the reason my dogs 'knew' when I was stopping work and it was 'their' turn, and this meant the afternoon 'walks.' No matter how hard I tried not to telegraph my intention they 'seemed' *to know*.

It happened too when I was thinking of them for some reason. Opening their eyes wide and looking in my direction,

it was as if they were saying ‘why are you thinking about us? What’s on?’

Snudge—our beloved Snudge—was the next dog to bring distress and heartache to us all.

When the gallery was open to the public Snudge often chose to sleep in her basket in a corner of the gallery room adjoining the workshop, tolerating the occasional interest of visitors. Never once did she cause concern except Bette would counsel mothers not to let their children cause nuisance. Snudge was perfect in every sense, and her presence did ensure protection should any unpleasantness arise, which luckily never happened. After all who would want to challenge the authority of any dog, particularly one of her size and dark countenance, and her ‘un-readable’ demeanour? Who indeed?

One day, without any warning, and aged only about eight years, in good health and seemingly strong of body and limb, her hind legs collapsed beneath her. I wondered whether a snake had bitten her and tried to help her to her feet. She seemed to be in no pain but it was obvious something severe had happened. I drove our car, a station wagon, to the gallery door

and somehow picked Snudge up in my arms. Lying her in the back I drove to the vet clinic. Our friend David wasn't there but his reliable younger partner Craig was on duty. He too was a dog-lover and after examining her told us the sad news that Snudge was paraplegic and nothing could be done. Without even taking Snudge from the car he mercifully put her to sleep. Did Snudge read my mind then? Did she know it was the end? We could hardly bear the parting. What added to our shock was that it was totally sudden, and unexpected.

I recall hearing recently an important person saying that human beings are the only ones in the mammal world who have any intimation of their own mortality. How the hell would he know? I thought; another example of human conceit? Consciousness is the biggest of the mysteries and who really knows the extent of 'awareness' any of us have?

Whatever the answers to those questions Snudge is gone, lovingly and sadly buried in the earth where she had roamed.



Snudge, Damon and Bloss



Bloss in a less ladylike pose.

Annie

I have already made mention of Annie the Ridgeback. She came to us as a gift from a friend, who, apart from being a wise and compassionate writer on matters humanely human was also a genuine dog-lover.

As dog-lovers do we had told our friend Anne the sadness of losing Snudge. She responded with the genuine understanding and love that one would have expected. She knew the only way to console anyone who grieves for a departed canine friend is for the emptiness to be filled with a new affirmation of canine love.

Unknown to us Anne's own beloved lady-dog, had a month or so earlier, given birth to a litter of puppies and one was to be ours. This spontaneous loving gift meant we were privileged to further entwine lives, in so many ways, for the next sixteen years. We called our new family member Annie.

As Blossom was now of responsible age it was her turn to assume the surrogate role of canine parent. She did well.

We learned much about Ridgebacks. They are interesting dogs and have a

background which some claim can be traced back some hundreds of years. Opinions differ as to how the breed actually came about but there is agreement that it was developed both as a guard and a hunting dog. The breed became known as the African Lion Dog (or Hound).

Eventually the type was set, a standard written, and accepted by kennel authorities early in the 20th century.

‘Ridgies’ are said to be very tough and brave. They are also intelligent and have a highly developed instinct for team-work, which is important as they often hunt in packs. They are also said to be resistant to disease, their immune system strengthened by being crossed with an African native dog which presumably also bestowed the spine ‘ridge.’ It is a curious characteristic of the Ridgeback, this narrow backwards-growth of hair on the spine. On some dogs this ‘ridge’ is more perfectly formed than it is on others. Our Annie had a perfect ridge. ‘Ridgies’ are said to be athletes by nature but our Annie could see little sense in exercise done only for the sake of it. Unless there was a demonstrated reason for her to be otherwise I thought she was inclined to

laziness, or to judge her more kindly, perhaps just 'laid-back.'

Our Annie's natural instinct for pack-hunting became obviously demonstrated on her morning or afternoon walks.

A neighbour's dog—by name of Tammy—often enjoyed a game of 'stirring' by scratching on the large lane-front doors of my workshop. (Sometimes she also did this during the night which was of greater annoyance, especially as our bedroom was immediately above the 'action.'

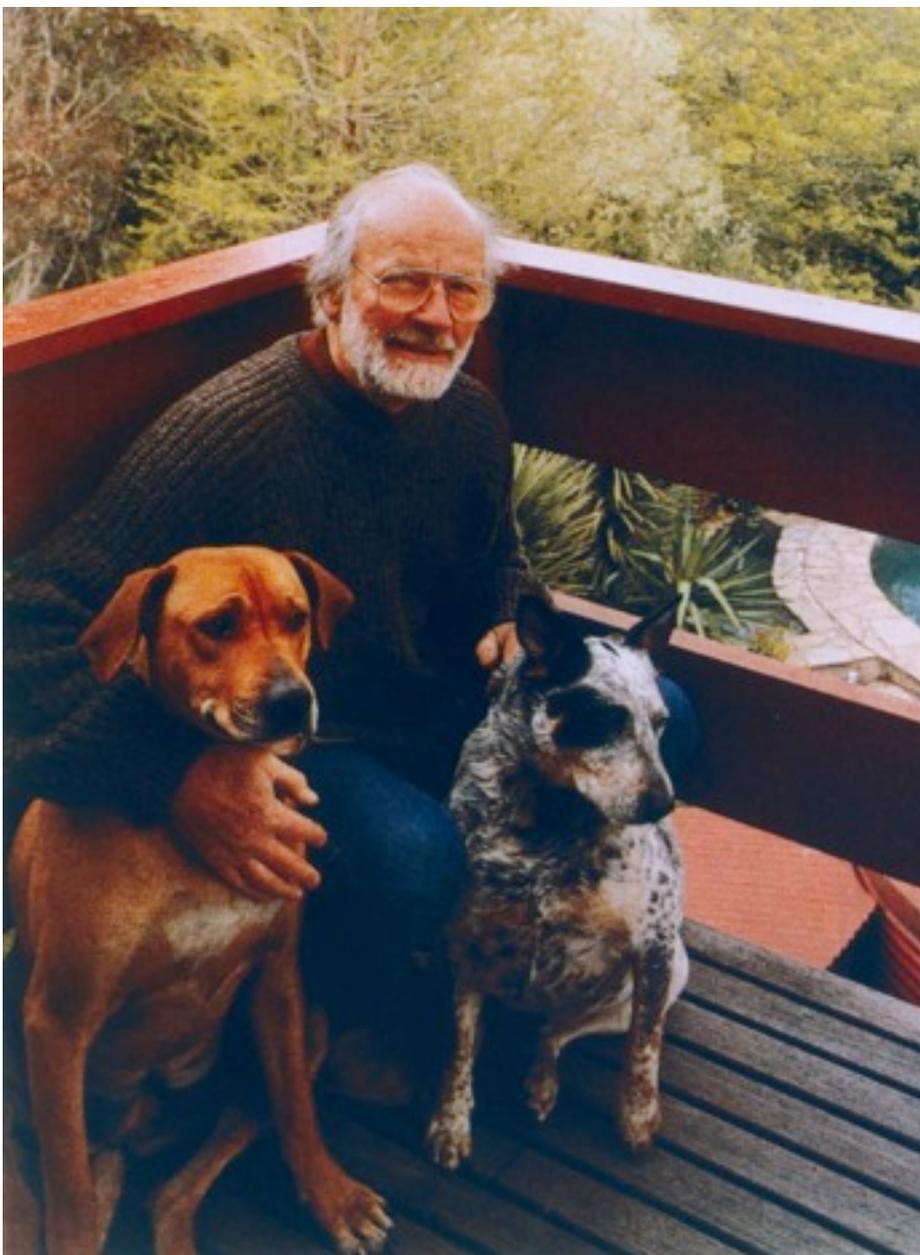
Blossom took exception to this unwanted interference and it was intriguing the way she administered her punishment. When the three of us, myself Bloss and Annie emerged from the workshop into the lane for our afternoon walk, Tammy, of course, would rather unwisely voice her displeasure, and on occasions challenge my animals to 'do their worst.' Bloss would immediately employ her own retaliatory manoeuvre. Where she learned to do this I'll never know but it took the form of a secret Judo or Aikido 'throw' which sent Tammy flipping over on her back. Try as I might I could never see how she did it, but it was her own special technique of subduing any and every

canine adversary. And it happened at the speed of light.

Our Annie meantime, always, *always*, sank down on her haunches and grabbed the upturned Tammy by her thigh and held on. At this stage I immediately stepped-in and stopped the brawl because I was more concerned about Annie doing damage than I was by Bloss. Annie gave the impression that she was quite capable of removing the entire leg. I could see then that she had the natural instinct of a pack-hunter. I joked, in the re-telling of the story, that it was in her genes to grab a lion by the right-side back leg. I must emphasise that Tammy was never hurt, and on occasions inflicted a bite of her own on Bloss, evidenced by a few scars that could only have come from her.

Actually, when Annie did fight, it was not only formidable but also quite frightening. even beautiful in a balletic kind of way. When she did get into an occasional brawl I stopped it very quickly because I feared the consequences. Annie looked to be a very efficient fighter but I was never sure she wasn't also a killer.

Annie also had another curious trait that somewhat intrigued me. She lived in the house of course, but if she



Annie, me and Bloss

entered a room, and there happened to be someone already in there, but knew that person was there with our consent, she was almost apologetic for intruding. But, if she happened to be in a room and a stranger walked in on her, she roared like a lion. I recall one occasion her being in the downstairs gallery part of our house and my brother-in-law, visiting from another city, walked in on her. She roared at him and I called out to him 'not to

move, I was coming.’ He called back ‘don’t worry I’m not.’

I don’t think Annie would have done more than keep him cornered, but it indicated to me her guarding instinct.

I have previously mentioned my thoughts on dogs and their empathetic faculty: Bloss and Annie knew exactly when it was time for me to stop work, that it was ‘walk time.’ I used every pretence to indicate they had ‘got it wrong,’ continuing work, but it was exactly at the precise time I ‘thought’ of

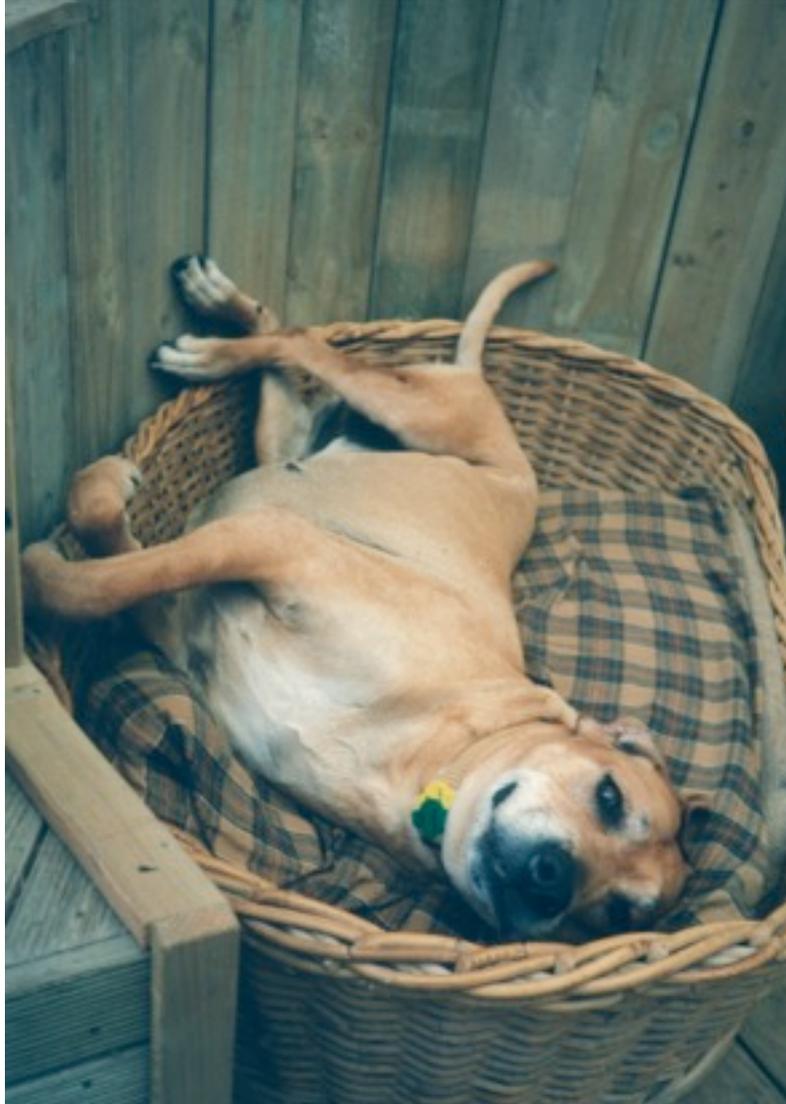


Annie and Bloss

finishing
work that

they jumped up and excitedly ran to the door. I was sure I *must* be doing *something* that telegraphed this but I am positive it wasn’t the case. It became a ‘game’ with me pretending

my work-day *hadn't* finished. It was uncanny. I wondered, yet again, whether or not there is some physical



Laid-back Annie

aspect of thought, a dimension we don't understand. Sceptics might tend to ridicule but it is difficult to exchange ideas with someone who has a closed mind on the subject. My time spent with the Zen master in Japan certainly reinforced my view that

not all of what we might call, higher-awareness, is to be scoffed at.

In fact, the Zen master was a very tough-minded thinker. He was more highly educated than most who would tend to deride. For him there was no questioning the subtleties of 'mind-to-mind' teaching and learning.

Dogs, perhaps in a dimension of thought different from our present human capacity might have a highly-developed sense of awareness quite beyond our own. At the present time there are many learned papers on the subject of human consciousness, some re-examining teachings of two-thousand years or more. In this computer age it is not too difficult to access this wisdom but it does take more than a cursory reading to uncover the gems: one must remove the dross of smugness or scepticism for the burnish of truth to shine through. This is one nice aspect of dogs, they have no smugness as we often do.

Throughout history there have always been those who have undertaken this journey driven by little more than a deep instinct for the rightness of the path they follow. None should be greatly surprised by the depth and intensity of the spiritual urge when it

arises, nor should they be surprised by the bigotry and ridicule of those for whom this search is an affront to their sense of reason.

Perhaps we might be forced to wait for newer insights to challenge the perceptions of a 'new age.'

Home away from home.

When travelling away for short periods we left our dogs in kennels. Not all were as good as they were supposed to be, but we did find one that approached perfection. They were put in 'double' accommodation but separated at 'food-time.' However friendly dogs normally are food can bring out the worst in them. With heated mattresses and nice competent dog-loving kennel maids, it was as nice a holiday home one could find and we could enjoy our travels with less concern.

It was the dogs themselves that indicated which kennels were good, and which were less so, and also those which were bad. Some kennels were so odious the dogs could almost be heard saying that they would leave home before consenting to stay there again.

Chopper

All dogs are interesting. They're not so different to humans and some have so large an impact they prove to be unforgettable.

One especially memorable visitor was a lady-dog called 'Chopper.' An inspired name because her tail curled upwards in a half semi-circle and when she wagged it the tip traced almost perfect circles like a helicopter blade. It was our son Damon's dog, but one was never sure whether the dog found him or whether it was the other way around: either way the meeting seem ordained, an act of 'higher order.'

Damon, for a period between studies, worked in a pottery factory. It was a family-owned enterprise with a history dating back four generations to its pioneer beginnings.

The boss, a friend of mine, was not always known for his gentle nature or constant good humour, but these apparent lapses were mainly a cover for the stresses involved in running an unpredictable business.

Bob was a good bloke really and didn't show annoyance when a stray dog began to haunt the works, no doubt encouraged by the workers giving her scraps to eat. This dog appeared to

be something of a street-kid. In appearance she certainly had some amount of bull-terrier or boxer in her make-up but had longer legs than one expects in a 'bullie-cross.' She was a brownish-brindle with stripes of black and if her nose had been pointier some might have wondered whether there was a remnant of Tasmanian Tiger in her DNA. Anyway, whatever the mixture, it so happened that she looked at Damon, who looked back at her and a bond was established.

Without words or signed agreement a commitment was made, one to the other. And she was given a name to register the relationship.

Chopper at one time in her life must have been owned because someone had seen to her being de-sexed.

Perhaps she might have come from some pet-rescue place where, quite properly, they insist on de-sexing before allowing a dog out of their care. Maybe having been adopted she, quite simply didn't like her owners and walked out. She certainly had a mind of her own, and as the saying goes, didn't take fools gladly. Whatever the reason a life 'on the streets' was more to her liking than living a life decided for her. As everyone knows, not all dog-owners are worthy of the dogs in

their charge. And so it was that Chopper, orphan and street-kid, found a new life. And we had a constant visitor.

When a situation demanded Damon's absence elsewhere Chopper lived with us. We didn't mind of course and on more than a few occasions she was an extended house-guest. After all, she was family.

Blossom and Chopper 'crossed paths' a few times but it was more in the nature of a statement, or mild protest, rather than a real confrontation.

Eventually they seemed to reach some sort of understanding, each pretending the other didn't exist. I don't think Bloss *really* thought it fair though when Chopper took over one of the lounge-chairs usually used by the owners of the establishment; this was really 'pushing it' a bit. No one knew how old Chopper was. It isn't always easy judging a dog's age, and 'living off the streets' doesn't guarantee either proper nourishment or tooth care.

I don't know why Chopper became unwell. At the time she was staying with us and we took her to David the vet on several occasions. On one visit he looked at her gums and said she needed a blood transfusion. David's

own dog, a very large and amiable Labrador had been called-upon to perform this role more than once. Chopper was given blood in a direct dog-to-dog affair. I recall it was a Sunday and at David's request drove from the Hills to the City to the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science: it was hoped a sample of Chopper's blood would throw light on her illness. Back at our home I made Chopper a comfortable bed alongside where I was working. Clearly she wasn't well. Reluctant to leave her bed, even to drink, I would fill a sponge with water and squeeze it into her mouth. A moment I will never ever forget happened at lunch-time the same day. I had carried Chopper upstairs at lunch-time, making her comfortable in her appropriated chair. Bloss, who was passing-by, suddenly paused and stared. She didn't look directly at Chopper, but more around her as though seeing something none of us could see. Then—and I had not heard her do this before, or since—she lifted her muzzle and gave an eerie mournful howl almost as though she recognised the closeness of death. Later, as it was a softly sunny day outside, I carried Chopper onto the lawn and lay on the grass beside her. I

knew she was very ill and actually said to her, “Chopper, I’m sorry but I don’t



Chopper

know what else we can do.”

Chopper shifted her gaze to my face, looking directly into my eyes, and then—something she had never done before—actually placed her paw on my arm: if she could have talked I had the uncanny feeling she was trying to comfort me, saying it was alright, she knew she had to go and was ready. We had never had this sort of intimate relationship before: I loved

her, of course, but she was Damon's dog and I was doing the right thing for both of them. In the last few days it had changed; I was Damon's father and now, in some quite mysterious way, I had become her link with him. What she was 'saying' to me was what she would have been 'saying' to him. I carried her back inside putting her in the basket alongside me where I was working. A little later she rose from her lying position and sat up, front legs straight, then stretching her nose and head high she looked upwards for what seemed a long time, her breaths coming slower and slower; then very gently and very slowly she lowered herself down and life left her. It was not only a dignified 'going' but one I felt deserved the word 'spiritual.'

Chopper has a special place in our hearts still.



Chopper with Damon

The City life

It happens to us all: the day comes when just around the next corner is old age, with stiff joints, the onset of frailty and, in our case, too many steps to climb. It was inevitable we leave our 'House in the Hills' before it was forced upon us. It is a bit silly for two elderly people to rattle around in a three-storey home, especially so when you live on the two upper floors and have to climb stairs constantly. Better to shift with a semblance of ease and grace rather than as an abrupt imposition. In the City, we lived in a single-storey home, but it had a workshop. The man of the household quickly realised that suburban streets are not as interesting, nor as hauntingly beautiful as mounded hills and cupped valleys which on frosty cold mornings are filled with mist, looking as though from an Irish fairy-tale. Nor are city streets as spiritually uplifting as worn slopes or tree-covered climbing ranges or even the combed farming areas with strawberries, brussel sprouts, rhubarb, trellises of grapes, and orchards of apples pears and cherries as they follow the seasons. Nor is city air as clear and sharp.

The dogs, rather surprisingly, accommodated to the change of address with more acceptance than did their usual walking companion. In our new suburban home we lived close to shopping and doctors and banks and all the other things that make city-dwelling sensible. Nearby parks did give some open space for the dogs and they accepted the changes with interest, and good grace. On long walks they began to become familiar with new sights and sounds, and of course, interesting smells. There were two little Jack Russell's living next door, one male and the other female. The jaunty little male thought both girls had come down from the Hills especially to be next door to him. Not so the female; she thought they should be shown the rules of the neighbourhood and told how to behave. Unwisely she snapped at Bloss who very quickly did her trick turning her on her back. Jacqueline Russell thought this was a mistake and it hadn't happened. Another snap, the same result, and staring at the sky she both 'got the message' and the rules of a new established order. 'No mucking around with Bloss' I thought. Annie was so 'laid-back' she didn't even notice.

Annie really didn't care where she lived just so long as it was with us and there was a comfortable bed, and food, especially lots of it. She never could see sense in 'walking for walking's sake.' And so all of us suburbanites settled-down to a newer life-order.

Rhody and Steffi

Neighbour's dogs or ones met on walks were guarded but civilised. As we got to know each other friendships developed, as they do with people and especially so with dogs as a go-between. There is nothing like dogs to smooth the way and get people talking. Bit by bit, there were even those special ones who found a place in our hearts. Two dogs who became our close friends were owned by our son Damon and his wife Lucinda. They had returned to Adelaide from living in another city. One of the new doggie friends was called Steffi, a loveable little female black Staffordshire Bull Terrier who had been rescued from the uncertain future that awaits all abandoned dogs. The other one was called Rhody, a tall imposing looking male Rhodesian Ridgeback.

Steffi was a delight and showed none of the quick change of temper that was said to be one aspect of the 'Staffy' nature. Of course, dogs, like humans, carry rumour and reputation around with them, even if both are untrue. The Bull Terrier reputation might have been earned because of the so-called sports of bull-baiting and dog-fighting.

But those days are long gone except for the illegal activities of sadists who see sport in dog-fighting. Any breed of dog can be brutalised and if this has happened they can behave in a way that is out of character. Sadly there might be more psychopaths in the human animal than amongst dogs.

Little Steffi was a joy to have around and her love for her owners, and other human-animals generally made her visits very pleasant.

Her big friend and doggie companion was also rescued from an uncertain fate. Steffi might have been small but Rhody was, in contrast, about four to six times bigger and they made quite a comical pair. How such beautiful animals ended up in dog refuges is difficult to understand.

In their new home the two slept in a large dog's basket. It was amusing to see one small black dog sometimes atop, or behind and hidden from sight with a very large Ridgeback taking up all the bed.

Both became extended members of our family and on occasions they were house guests. 'The only thing to watch out for with Rhody' — to use Damon's words — 'he will blindly cross a six-lane highway to inspect a discarded pie-bag.' Cars might not have caused him

concern but big Rhody had a blind fear of storms. Any sort of noise like thunder, such as to be heard on 'cracker' nights, would see one enormous Ridgeback, driven by absolute terror, trying to climb onto anyone's lap for comfort and



Rhody in Rosslynd Piggott's studio

protection.

We came to know many dogs. In our street one worthy of special mention was Gemma owned by friends of ours. She was one of those very clever border collies. She is the only dog I can remember as

being annoyed at aircraft flying overhead. I, in fact, couldn't hear some of them, especially those that flew at about forty-thousand feet, but Gemma could and barked at the vapour trails. Her two loving owners obeyed her every whim. She grew old graciously and is now buried in their garden.

Another friend had a beautiful 'designer' dog who loved life. She never saw the car that hit her as she blindly ran across its path to say hello to another dog..

Harry was another happy dog who lived next door but loved car rides so much he was found in a car on a day so hot he had died of organ failure. It happens very quickly.

Jack and Jacqueline Russell both died as life ran out through old age.

I used to pat another one through the fence where he lived. He was one of the new 'designer' poodle crosses. He would jump up on his hind legs straining to allow my hand to stroke him under his jaw and around his neck. His name was Ollie. I missed him for short breaks and thought he may have gone on holidays. Then a whole week passed and a neighbour told me he had developed some sort of incurable progressive wasting disease and had been put to sleep, sadly after

only two years of life. His owners did all they could. I miss him still as I pass the spot where we used to pause and say 'good morning Ollie.'

I have an elderly Italian friend who had a Rottweiler boy dog. He died too. His brother and his wife who live next door are especially good with dogs and have a clever one called Casey Brown. Dogs don't live long enough and there are always goodbyes. The list, sadly, is never fully finished.

All dogs with a Buddha nature.

We got used to living in the city and did so in relative peace. The years went by without too many interruptions but, like ageing cars, humans as well as dogs, need increasing maintenance. Blossom was around sixteen years and Annie a year younger but neither went for exercise-walks anymore preferring to lie in the sun in the back yard.

One day I took Bloss to see our friend David the Vet: both dogs still had their yearly 'jabs' and other pills, but on this particular occasion, I took Bloss alone. David is not one for small talk: questions and answers are best described as 'economical,' unless it is about his favourite subjects and these,

especially politics, often provoked verbals jousts.

“How long has she had that lump on the shoulder?” To be honest I hadn’t really noticed the lump, thinking perhaps Bloss was becoming a little arthritic or just changing shape, as do some older humans.

“It’s an osteo-carcinoma and she won’t last long. No, there’s nothing that can be done.”

He was right and the end did come quite quickly.

For the week or so before she died I slept on the floor alongside Bloss. The dogs had slept inside for a couple of years and were not going to be put out now.

Bloss was a fastidious little girl and she made it obvious when she wanted to ‘go outside.’ Selfishly I wanted to keep her as long as possible but I wonder now whether I should have relinquished this hope earlier.

It was during this period of ‘closeness’ of our contact that I became aware, once again, of the depth of a merging of minds; the *knowing beyond understanding* that crosses the seemingly deep gulf said to separate the species. On one occasion she lifted her head and gazed directly into my eyes for what seemed to be a long

time. Whatever the message was, in those strangely luminous deep black pools of 'knowing,' it transcended differences between dog and human. I had seen it before and again felt the same mysterious 'knowing.' She almost told me it was now time, and 'she knew.'

The pain was worse and it was an emergency. I couldn't get David and a different vet came to the house; he lived across the road and had an impressive reputation.

I was shocked how large the syringe was, full with a chromish-green liquid. We fed her ham which she took greedily and urgently, then quickly died. Scarcely a tiny 'mille' of that evil-looking but merciful green had gone in before she died.

"She's gone" said Nick, and I felt it couldn't be.

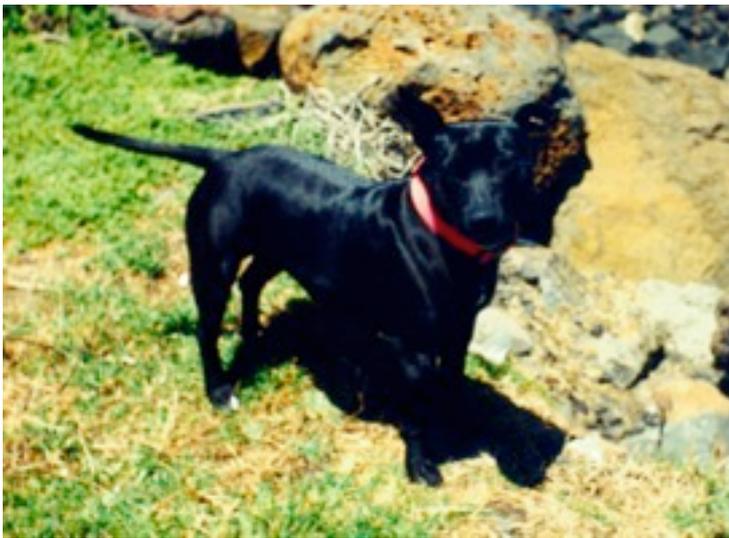
"She was ready to go" he said, sensing my disbelief.

"Can I help you?" he asked but what had to be done was my job. He did help me carry her outside and I was left with my deep sadness.

Annie also lived close to sixteen years; some sort of record, I'm told, for 'Ridgies.' She wasn't sick and ate heartily but apart from that there was

no communication whatsoever: Annie had already 'died,' in her mind. David came, observing with his usual directness, "some dogs should've gone earlier but didn't know it." Both are in the garden, one dug deeper than the other.

It is sad that dogs do not live the time-span of human years, of three-score and ten, and more. The average for a dog is about twelve years, although some seem to have set a record of



Steffi

sorts and lived twice that—but that is rare.

Damon and Lucinda's doggies, Steffi and Rhody both died too, in their turn; it was time for them too.



Carter

They 'rescued' another dog which they called Carter. He was young and exuberant and without any natural caution: in one happy mad dash he ended his life under a cattle truck. A sudden thud and he had gone.



Jilly-bean

A little later another rescued dog came into their lives. It was variously called a 'cross with some Jack Russell in her.' (I find that Jack Russells are

blamed for any 'crosses' similarly-coloured to them). I tend to think this new family member is more hound than terrier. With longer legs than a Jack Russell, she can run as 'fast as the wind.' But that was before one elderly gentleman fed her prawns and pies fattening her without constraint. Her name is Jilly, or to give her the full name, officially given, Jilly-bean. Shouldn't it have been 'Jelly-bean?'

Sugar



I wondered did Sugar ever recall how she came to us? We certainly do. Only a short fortnight after Annie had died her owners decided to go to a breeder we knew. Alex breeds top-class heelers and kelpies which he sends around the world. When we visited the kennels there was one young heeler pup returned by an owner who thought her inadequate for the honour and high office being

offered. Her crime, apparently, was to stay secluded under a bush from where she wouldn't be coaxed.

Obviously something was wrong with the pup!

It was a very beautiful youngster, soft grey-blue coat with light-tan splashes on its ears and paws. Jumping up on the wired enclosure it showed an eagerness to please and be loved.

But then, almost hurtling from Alex's van came a bullet of a dog. Certainly not pretty but there was something very purposeful in the way she moved. In fact she reminded me a little of Blossom's mother Kiff.

"This one? What's her story?"

Overweight, determined, oblivious to everyone but seemingly impelled by a blind instinct to map this new territory to know exactly where she was, her intelligence and life-force was almost physical. She was a new arrival at the kennels. The story came out: she had been owned by girls who went about their business of being young. There was food and water of course, but the dog with nothing to do all day, and perhaps night, would eat and bark and eat again. We were to discover she most certainly had never been socialised to the world outside. There had been a litter of pups somewhere

along the way. What had happened to them? I had the feeling the parting had been recent. There was much we didn't know, only that she had been abandoned (perhaps more fairly, 'had to' be abandoned) for reasons we didn't know. 'Clean break' the girls said. 'no, not even visiting rights.'

We took Sugar, a decision bidden by some unspoken, even unknown, rule that neither of us questioned, nor could ever know.

Leaving the kennels she was compliant but uncompromising, sitting up on the back seat of the car, not missing a beat, thinking perhaps this old couple were to take her back home —not *their* home of course, but *her* home. Clearly she didn't know what was happening.

In a new home she was given anxious love by owners, themselves bereaved, uncertain and still heart-empty.

Her questioning was obvious. Her own leather chair was alongside ours but it was obvious she suffered and this went on week after long week, waiting, waiting, and still waiting, her confusion obvious. What? Why?

Walks on a lead were frustrating and unpleasant. Had she never been walked? Had she never spent time

with other dogs? Was she still suffering the removal of her own pups?

The sight of any dog, even one in the distance, brought an almost insane response—a twisting choking wrenching contest.

Obedience school? *‘Please do not bring that dog back!’*

Attempting a muzzle-lead she rolled on her back and instantly, deftly, using front paws as hands, removed it.

There was a screen door, the rear door of the house, and I grasped a paw and showed her how it could be opened.

Once was enough, except she used the other paw—she was left-pawed.

From then on she let herself out, then in, through the door. Her great intelligence was obvious, but even so, nothing could tell her what was happening in her life.

David the vet said she was at least fifteen kilograms over-weight. She needed de-sexing and that added to her confusion. What had she done to deserve being hurt like that?

‘You might be nice people’ she finally indicated ‘but I don’t live here.’

The weeks became months, and a year, then into yet another.

One day, sad beyond understanding, full of futility and frustration and thwarted beyond measure, she

snapped. Not seriously, but a final last protest of a half-show of teeth and a hesitant half-bite into the air.

Immediately held aloft to eye level, and in final frustration, she was told 'you might not like it but you do live here....you must get used to it or we have to, in fact *must*, let you go.'

Lowered back into her basket it finally 'got through.' Her own tribe had left for reasons not known and she belonged to a new tribe. It had been hard for her to accept—her dingo ancestors not only gave her a long long memory, but unquestioning loyalty and obedience to the tribe, *her* tribe.

It is true she did have great recall; in fact her memory was uncanny.

Walking along a street, even many months since the only time we had walked there, she immediately recalled which houses far ahead had dogs and fastened her pace. The whole territory was mapped in her mind. Once was enough for her to position places on later visits. It was the same with people. She finally, *finally* relinquished her former life, eventually becoming devoted to us, accepting us without question, and all who came to visit. It was as though the slate was cleared. She had come to realise our devotion to her and also her need of us. At long

last she could see us with clear eyes,
as though for the first time.

Sugar loved people, but some dogs,
even when they became familiar, were
not overly welcome. A few were
unceremoniously turned on their
backs, and she might not have
stopped there.



Sugar There were exceptions: in the
 park small dogs who silently
 acknowledged her authority were
 accepted, then respected, and finally
 liked. But if they yapped, and insanely
 so, it was an invitation for swift
 detonation.
 She still had a mother's instinct alive in
 her because even yapping scrambling
 puppies were tolerated, given license;
 perhaps a remnant of her grief at
 losing her own pups? It came to us,
 this thought, that if losing owners was
 hard enough what must it have been
 like for her to lose her pups? What had

happened to them? Sold? Given away? Cared for properly by new owners? Were they given inoculations, or wormed? Every dog needs care and if owners are not prepared for the expense they shouldn't own them. There should be even more stringent laws protecting pets, as there are laws protecting people. There's no excuse for not caring for pets: it is no longer like it was when I was a boy; vets are now everywhere.

Sugar was the most interesting animal I have ever had anything to do with and I am sure most of her early problems were to do with her lack of socialising. It is no different really to a child brought up in isolation then suddenly thrust into a large school-yard. A child, at least can ask questions, or be given explanations, but not a dog. I had almost given up on her, but was extremely glad I hadn't. At long last she had the security and confidence of her own home and family.

When Sugar first came to us and we were endeavouring to reduce her weight she was almost frantic and gave every indication of craving food. If there was no food to eat she would

eat the soap in the bathroom. Or she would steal a sock to suck, or would stuff a lump of her bedding in her mouth. She had an oral complex of quite immense proportions, all to do with being left with unlimited food and I was sad for her. Discussing diet with David the vet resulted in a combination of chicken-carcass mince, beef mince, rice and mixed vegetables: the vegetables were not, and could not be digested adding little or nothing of value to her diet, but made up comforting bulk. She was given treats, but did lose weight. Those years of being overweight no doubt caused some of her later problems.

Her main issues, despite her basically nice nature, had been psychological. It actually was good for us, in one sense at least, coming to terms with her problems, because in endeavouring to understand her better we added to our understanding of dogs in general, and this breed in particular. It was also obvious that any effort one makes in 'understanding' a dog, or any animal for that matter, or a human, also helps one in understanding ourselves. If there is a truly Australian dog it is the Heeler.

Australia's own dog.

In the early days of Australia's settlement there were many attempts at breeding dogs in the hope of producing an animal suitable for whatever the job required. The main *jobs* they were needed for was to either work with sheep, or work with cattle. Dogs fell into a rough division of being either 'barkers' or 'biters.' There was no problem when it came to sheep because the working dogs brought out by the early settlers were perfect being both highly intelligent and with a developed instinct for herding. These dogs however were not overly favoured for working with cattle. In the early 1900's a dog was bred which was to prove perfect for this purpose; the Australian 'heeler.' How it came about was documented in a book called *Australian Barkers and Biters*, written by Robert Kaleski, and published in 1914. It records the various experiments in cross-breeding attempting to produce a dog with the required toughness, not only for working with wild cattle but also coping with the harshness of the Australian scrub. Beginning with the cleverness of the imported border-collie, or Scottish Blue

Merle animals, and similar-type dogs, after many experiments with cross-breeding, including the Australian Dingo, the final development was a genuine 'true-blue' local dog, the 'Australian heeler.'

Heelers are also known as Blue Heelers or Red Heelers, and the breed is often referred to as the Queensland Blue Heeler, or just Queensland 'blue,' or simply 'bluey.' Despite the name the dogs no more belong to Queensland than anywhere else where the breed developed. Interestingly, both reds and blues can come from the one litter.

They are born white then change as they develop as puppies. They have double coats which means they are fairly tolerant of cold. They do shed copious hair at certain times which can be a deterrent to them living indoors as family pets.

It is also said that the relative heaviness or lightness of 'heelers' is determined by the dingo type in the DNA. Some breeders claimed that the introduction of the 'plains' dingo determined offspring that were lighter and more agile of build, making them more suited for work in cattle-yards. It is claimed that the heavier type of 'heeler' had the mountain dingo in its make-up, and this dog was tougher,

heavier, more suited to crashing through rough and heavy undergrowth to chase out reluctant or recalcitrant animals.

Eventually the Australian Kelpie was developed for working with both sheep and cattle. However clever they were at rounding-up, dogs working with sheep should certainly not bite, but with cattle mustering the bark often needed the supporting encouragement of an added nip, or 'heel.'

The 'heeler,' like the Kelpies, and the sheep-dogs generally, is a dog which can 'think.' Our Sugar certainly was, a 'thinker.'

Sugar was a heavier-type animal; she looked somewhat baleful and formidable, which belied her lovely nature with humans. But when she fixed you with her stare you weren't all that sure of her intentions.

I recall a time, during an early-morning walk in the local park. I was enjoying watching the Tree Martins performing their miracle flight chasing insects, whilst nearby in a stand of trees a koala bear was being harassed by the native Miner birds. I noticed a man crossing the park who showed more than a little apprehension when he saw Sugar slouching in his direction. It isn't

pleasant to be worried about strange dogs so I called out that she was OK, there was no danger, adding jokingly, she had already eaten her breakfast.

His reply was one to remember:

"That's all very well but I've seen one of these pull down a bloody bull." Of course he was right; they are tough animals and one can't be sure they are kindly disposed to everyone: there's always an occasional thug or one that's very territorial.

Sugar became a confident and somewhat cheerful dog. On occasions, running in the park, to demonstrate her happiness she would do a 'barrel roll' or 'victory roll.' Whilst in full flight, and without pausing, she would lower one shoulder and do an astonishing forward-moving spiral roll and then on returning to an upright position and regaining her feet would continue running without seeming to miss a beat. This, seen at full speed, was quite spectacular. No one could have taught her that.

One other behavioural idiosyncrasy Sugar displayed intrigued us greatly, and it was something we had never seen with any other dog. It happened first when we had just rescued her. Whenever she was confronted with

'head-level' foliage on a bush she would immediately perform a rather odd, almost theatrical trance-like slow-motion movement reminiscent somewhat of an animal stalking prey. She would assume a pose, head fixed, nose slightly held upward, her posture stiff, pausing momentarily between steps, she would move forward, stiffly and slowly, a step at a time, foliage very slowly stroking or brushing her head.

But it wasn't 'stalking.' The impression was that she was re-enacting some deeply instinctive primaevial ritual. The look on her face was not as though she was seeing prey, or anything suggesting hunting, but rather one of an hypnotic or deep meditative state. Her eyes would be almost closed and she would inch forward, a pace so slow it was as though she was not moving at all.

There were some special bushes in the garden that triggered this ritual more than others. A Nandina, with feathery foliage, growing close to where we hung out the washing was certain to trigger this. We would stop and watch her ritual because there was something quite mysterious about it. After a few minutes she would suddenly stop as though to say, 'well,

enough of that playing silly-buggers; back to business, what are we doing next?' Tribal memory? One shouldn't forget she was quite recently descended from a 'wild' dog. Some Heeler owners have admitted even strengthening or topping-up the DNA of the Dingo when a sire was available but I don't know how true this is.

Sugar was a delightful companion in every way, once she learned that being 'socialised' was a two-way thing, that each had a part to play, and then, and only then, could it be fun. Each morning for many years I walked with Sugar until she became ill. She loved travelling in the car with us and also sharing an after-lunch nap with me on a day-bed; she thought this was absolute bliss.

Does a dog have Buddha nature?
More than a human does? As much
as a human does?

What *is* Buddha nature?

I have loved all my dogs but none more than Sugar, perhaps because she was the most troubled and certainly, for about two years, the most troublesome. It is said there's power in 'love' and it was so with her because with love and perseverance a bond of

such strength was formed that even I found it humbling beyond description. When she became ill I saw David and Craig at the vet clinic and blood tests were done. Sugar had Cushing's disease. She also had a heart murmur, and on top of that had developed a collapsed larynx. I thought two of these illnesses might have been due to her early lifestyle but I rather blamed myself for the larynx problem. She pulled so hard on the lead in those early days I wondered what damage might be occurring. It crossed my mind whether I should have been using a shoulder harness.

There were none of the expected signs of a dog suffering from Cushing's disease. She ate and drank normally, or seemed to. Symptoms from the two other disorders could have confused the issue. David prescribed pills for the heart murmur but she seemed not to tolerate them at all well and so we followed a safety regimen of non-stress. To stop her from becoming bored she was taken out in the car at every opportunity. This wasn't a problem because the weather was cooler and there was no chance of her becoming excessively hot, which is not only dangerous but can cause death quite quickly. Sugar herself imposed

limits on her activities making it obvious that walking even slowly was no longer part of her daily agenda.

One day a car drive was scheduled and although the distance was very short I thought Sugar might enjoy it. On returning I noticed Sugar had been ill. On lifting her out she raced up the back yard and I was a little alarmed as she was defecating as she ran. That was totally out of character. Taking a few minutes to clean out the back of the wagon where she had been sick I went to find her. Always obedient when I called, this time there was no response and I searched our rather overgrown garden. Could she have doubled back? I searched for fully ten to fifteen minutes and eventually did find her. She was sitting where she never sits and I sensed she was bewildered, even frightened and that caused me concern. By hiding from me was she in denial? It wasn't happening?

I lifted her lip-flap and noticed her gums were very white. David was on duty at the clinic: 'internal bleeding, you're losing her' was his response. He knew her very well and taking into account her illnesses wasn't all that surprised. She wasn't an old dog in

heeler terms. She had to be twelve years in age and heelers can live much much longer than that; some almost twice. I rang him later at home saying Sugar had gone outside and was confused and fearful. 'Don't leave her out there. Do you want a hand to get her in?' I said I didn't and somehow lifted 30kilos of sick dog carrying her inside to her bed.

I sat with her and she kept raising her head looking at me. The hours passed and dusk became darkness. It was late at night and then, raising her head from the side of the basket, there was that 'special' long long look that can't be described; a deep slow look that transcends differences. It is that look that tells you that soon a last wisp of breath will part you from someone for whom you have special love, and who in turn loves you. The words come to mind 'the love that passeth all understanding.'

Suddenly there was stillness, the stillness that is death.

Quite early next morning David rang: I told him the news and that we would bury her in the garden."That's where mine are, roses are doing well. Do you want a hand with the digging? I could get someone for you."

It had been raining and the earth was soft so I could manage. Anyway I didn't want anyone else there; she was our dog and it was my job to perform this last ritual.

Favourite bed clothes, a silk blouse of Bette's and my old jumpers were tucked under and around her and Sugar looked as loved as much as one can be when saying a final goodbye. I hoped she would draw warmth from the feeling of love.

She never left us: it is odd how dogs become part of ones pattern of living. I still can't pass where her basket used to be without the pang of it no longer being there, and what that means.

All the family feels a sense of bereavement and loss. Her photo is still next to my computer.

The mounded grave has a flower vase enclosed by her collar with its registration tag and name disc. I can't remove it, certainly not yet.

Is there a shadow-form remaining somewhere in a greater consciousness we both share? No one can answer that because no one knows—not even the cleverest of the 'clever' people.



Sugar's grave

Hebe the goddess

We were told a sad and rather frightening story of an elderly lady living on her own who suffered the all-too-common misfortune of falling in her home. Unable to get up she lay on the floor for four days. No one heard her calls and she was unable to reach the phone. What must have added to her fears she had a cat and a dog inside the house with her. The cat, a beautiful Devon Rex, later had to be put to sleep as a result of the privations she suffered, but her small whippet dog survived. She was able to source water from somewhere. The toilet? That seemed the only explanation. Anyone can go without food, but not water. What made the story more horrific was that the elderly lady was a veterinarian who, before retirement, had worked in the area of animal welfare and would have known the consequences for animals in that situation. Eventually she was discovered and hospitalised.

Dr Kate was a London-trained vet, who came to Australia and lived and worked her adult life in Adelaide. She was well-known in her profession and

from all accounts her practice had a highly-respected reputation.

When she closed her practice she took on the role as a 'vet caring for the abandoned' eventually even taking an abandoned dog for her own, a tiny whippet puppy she called Hebe; an inseparable pair for some ten years or more.

After Dr Kate's ordeal, and a period in hospital, she briefly returned to her home but inevitably it became obvious she needed constant care.

We knew a neighbour and enquired about the whippet, now kennelled. We knew that it was no longer responsible for us to take on a young animal, especially a puppy, but an old dog? And one which was homeless? And a gentle whippet at that? When the offer from us was relayed to the vet who had looked after Dr Kate's animals, he personally delivered the sad little dog, checking that ours was a 'safe' home. When we saw her it was a shock.

I wondered how starved you can become and not die?

What on earth had reduced her to this state? She looked as anorexic as someone close to death.

Who had been looking after the dog's welfare?

What sort of kennel-owner would allow a dog to be reduced to that point of starvation and not get veterinary help? Whippets aren't exactly, what you might call full-bodied dogs, but this little one was positively skeletal. She may have lost weight trying to keep warm; after all, it was Winter. Also, they are dogs who bond with humans and need their company: not for them a sack behind a shed to call home. Some say they should never be kennelled, such is their nature. Obviously no one had been checking on her welfare and I thought it unforgivable. Someone should have been responsible for what was probably the most important possession Kate had left in the world.

It is an irony the dog we hoped would replace Sugar would also be a 'heeler,' but the little dog we adopted couldn't have been more different. As the lady of our household said, 'with a heeler, one feels there is another human in the house, whereas with most other dogs, like this new little one, you must learn a different sort of language.' It is true, 'heelers' are very sagacious, and clever and if they have been brought-up to share a life with humans they very quickly adapt their

considerable intelligence to be on a similar wave-length. They also suffer our shortcomings with more forbearance than we do theirs.

Hebe the goddess is a special little animal and it is interesting both learning her new language, and watching her suspicions and reservations drop away, one by one. Obviously she had been through a lot in her not-so-short life. She too had been abandoned when young but fortunately had come to the notice of Dr Kate.

I confess to having faced a challenge in the early days Hebe was with us. I am rather ashamed to admit questioning whether she fitted the image I had of myself? True, I was rather proud of Sugar, especially her 'don't mess with me' attitude, and 'I'll only tell you once' look that made those who didn't know her better a little wary and respectful.

It was different with Hebe. There was I, on cold Winter mornings, leading a dog clothed in a 'designer jacket' from her wardrobe of jackets to keep her warm. I thought, 'is this *me?*'

I could hear the irony in the Zen Master's voice; 'is this about you, or about the dog?'

We went to the local park where I had walked Sugar, and there were strange dogs there with their owners. I wondered what the reaction would be from Hebe. To this point I had not heard her bark, but did so then. She had a surprisingly big bark, deeper than I expected, and given without caution or apprehension. I got ready to rescue her if any dog became aggressive. The other dogs came and exchanged introductions and all was well.

I told myself she too was expected to learn a different 'language.' And she had to sort her tiny head through all the changes that had occurred.

She had seen her beloved 'mother' Kate lying helpless on the floor. She had seen the cat sicken to the point of death. There was a lot we didn't know and never would know.

In the early weeks of our caring for Hebe I was concerned about one aspect of her behaviour.

Sugar had liked nothing better to be lifted onto the day-bed for an afternoon snooze with her 'dad.' The new little 'goddess' lady-dog was no different: in fact Hebe would like nothing better than to sleep with humans and not bother with any other bed. What did cause me concern was something that

happened more than a few times: Hebe was on the bed, apparently happily comfortable, when she would suddenly sit bolt upright and howl. She actually sounded as though she was bursting into tears.

Of course! Of course! The last time she had spent on a bed with anyone was with her beloved Kate, as she had done so for many many years. Why wouldn't she miss her? Why wouldn't the tragedy be recalled? People who say that this 'just isn't possible' with dogs perhaps themselves suffer from the all too common affliction of human superiority and conceit. We actually don't know *what* dogs' thoughts are, but given their intelligence one can have a good guess that they *are* a 'thinking' and 'feeling' animal, and, they do have a splendid memory.

I also witnessed Hebe having quite severe nightmares which give added cause to wonder what she had been through. I jokingly tell the lady of our house that my day-bed in the office now 'doubles' as a dog-psychiatrist's couch. Truly!

Seriously though, any dog-owner with average sensitivity and a modicum of canine behaviour-awareness will tell you dogs have very good recall. And they do have emotions. Even dogs of

less obvious intelligence *do* have this capacity, as well as the ability to think, perhaps better than some humans. As we were finding out, Hebe was a very intelligent little lady. She had lived many years; more than we knew of. I read as much as I could about the breed and found that the average life-span is about twelve to thirteen years, with some rare cases attaining the exceptional age of eighteen years, and there was the claim of one living beyond twenty.

Someone we know who was devoted to, and has owned, several whippets, thought there *were* signs of age in Hebe but said 'she hadn't yet got to the point where she looked like an old worn leather handbag.'

I was surprised that she still 'played.' She had her toys that came from her home; a teddy bear and a stuffed rabbit. She would tear up and down the hall with them, her surprisingly strong jaws shaking them as though they were animals she had just caught. Pity the poor animal she *did* catch because the quite violent shake of her head would do great damage. I had to lock her from any room when trying to vacuum, or sweep, because she would grab either broom or vacuum head

with a very strong grip. For her it was fun.

Little by little Hebe became a member of the family. She gained weight and health. Our friend David checked her for heart-worm infestation. We also asked David to clean her teeth, which had been neglected. David also enrolled her in a Vet Plan for five years, the 'useful' years he thought she still had. He said this was 'his contribution' to his late colleague Kate, and was nothing to do with me so any 'thank-you' was unnecessary.

I am sure he was appalled that an elderly member of the veterinary profession was in trouble and others who had known her for many years either didn't know, or showed little practical concern.

Hebe shared our lives for two and a half years.

Little by little I traced her background. I found she was even older than presumed. She had a microchip and we found the date it was inserted, and also the date she was adopted from Animal Welfare. I also traced the clinic which looked after her. November 1998 was the date of the first entry on the vet. clinic's books and Dr Kate thought Hebe was at least one year

old at the time. This means, at the time of this writing means she was close to sixteen years of age.

We know nothing of her very early history as she had been abandoned for reasons we may never know.

Hebe was happy with us. Of course, compared to the life she was living in the kennel with each day bringing her closer to her final time, our home must be heaven. When she came to us, every bone in her spine was protruding, her rib-cage rippled like an old wash-board and her hip bones were jutting, but with careful feeding and love she regained her healthy and weight showing only the four spinal lumbar bones which Dr Kate liked to see as a measure of her food intake; of 'enough' is enough.

In the right light one could see remnants of the quite lengthy scar stretching almost from her backbone to the bottom of her rib-cage; at one time she must have been seriously savaged.

This little dog had been through a lot but maintained her independence and toughness of mind. Apart from the occasional visits of the 'black dog' of depression, which became less and

less, she was happy, trusting and most importantly, very loving.

Bette, the lady of the house, who understands the female mind much better than I do, insists Hebe loved us equally. I jokingly say that I was the



Hebe the goddess whippet

first bloke in her life; her first boyfriend. She slept on her bean-bag alongside me.

When the door-bell rang during the day, she barked and raced to the door to see which one of her new friends



Hebe nearly fourteen years of age.

has come; life was again joyful. and even as a somewhat elderly lady she was playful as a young one would be. In human terms, allowing seven years of ours to one of hers, she was over one hundred years old, or more. She was still very elegant and we said she may yet get a telegram from the Queen.

Damon and Lucinda, as family shared in her love and this was very obvious. As Damon says, he would have willingly put her in his pocket anytime

and taken her home giving her a life equal to the one she had with us.

After two and a half years with us I noticed she was losing weight and her breath was developing a strange odour. David was on holidays and we saw Craig at the clinic. He took blood and checked it against a scale. She was, as he put it, 'off the scale.' He also checked her urine giving us the sad news she was suffering from renal failure and nothing could be done. She may last a few days or a month.

Hebe spent almost every day on a couch with her human mother. Bette loved her and together they shared in each others love. Bette said stroking her was like stroking silk.

She spent every night alongside my bed, gently awakening me when she wanted to go outside.

Hebe did last over a month and when she no longer ate or drank, or knew us, and was close to death friend David came and performed the last rites. Hebe was not aware of our presence. David has shared in our dogs for almost as many years he has been in practise. It is a bond we hold.

Hebe is buried with our beloved Sugar.

There are wispy clouds on Mount Olympus,
soft shades of lavender and pale purple.
Fragrance in the air,
an aura of wisdom and dignity.
Hebe, fair daughter of Zeus and Hera,
goddess of youth, cup-bearer of the gods,
has returned to the Elysian fields.

Milton Moon.

1997 — 2013. Monday 27th May.
In her sixteenth year.



As our dogs died over the years part
of us also died and went with them.
This privilege of sharing lives with a dog
can give a glimpse of consciousness
perhaps best described as
transcendental, an affirmation of life

one might otherwise not have experienced.

To speak about sharing a life with dogs as ‘transcendental’ is perhaps something certain clever folk of the world might scoff at, but none of us really knows everything. Anyway, it not a matter of ‘head’ rather one of ‘heart’ and ‘feeling.’ We don’t know the extremes of consciousness; a question for which there is no clever answer.

One day a dog might rest its face on your leg, or give you a gentle lick, or you might look into the depths of each other’s eyes. You might be surprised—an answer might come when you least expect it.

Hebe of course didn’t have an opinion on all this—but perhaps she did. After all, she was a goddess-dog and Dog is God spelt backwards.

*There she be—romping and darting
in sunlit Elysian fields.
Bounding gleefully through meadow
flowers and butterflies.
Fine, alert and sweetly swift,
graceful, gentle, playful.
Forever light and bright, forever lovely
there she be, there she is—dear Hebe.*

Michael Leunig. 28th May, 2013

Dedication:

to godson Tim Churcher,
also Bette, Damon and Lucinda Moon,
and to all our dogs,
joyfully found and sadly lost,
each in their own way
beloved friends
and teachers

Also my niece and god-daughter Kate,
and god-son Ned share in this
dedication.

With thanks:

To the memory of Kobori Nanrei (1918
—1992) priest and teacher; former
Osho of the Ryoko-in, Daitoku-ji,
Kyoto, Japan

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To the late Dr. 'Kate' McCarthy who, when she could no longer care for her beloved companion, the goddess Hebe, drew comfort from knowing she was in our care.



Mt Fuji—photo Robert Yellin

About the author.

In 1974, as a recipient of a Myer Foundation *Geijutsu* Fellowship for extended studies in Japan, the author Milton Moon met his teacher, the Zen priest, Kobori Nanrei of Ryoko-in a sub-temple at the Daitoku-ji in Kyoto. Moon's interest was in the relationship between Zen and Japanese culture in general, but in particular his own area of pottery and its part within the Japanese tea ceremony. He was persuaded the best way to undertake that study was from the 'inside out' and given permission to take instruction. He studied for the period of 1974 and maintained contact with the Zen Master until his death in 1992.

www.miltonmoon.com

